# The Japan Society Review 48

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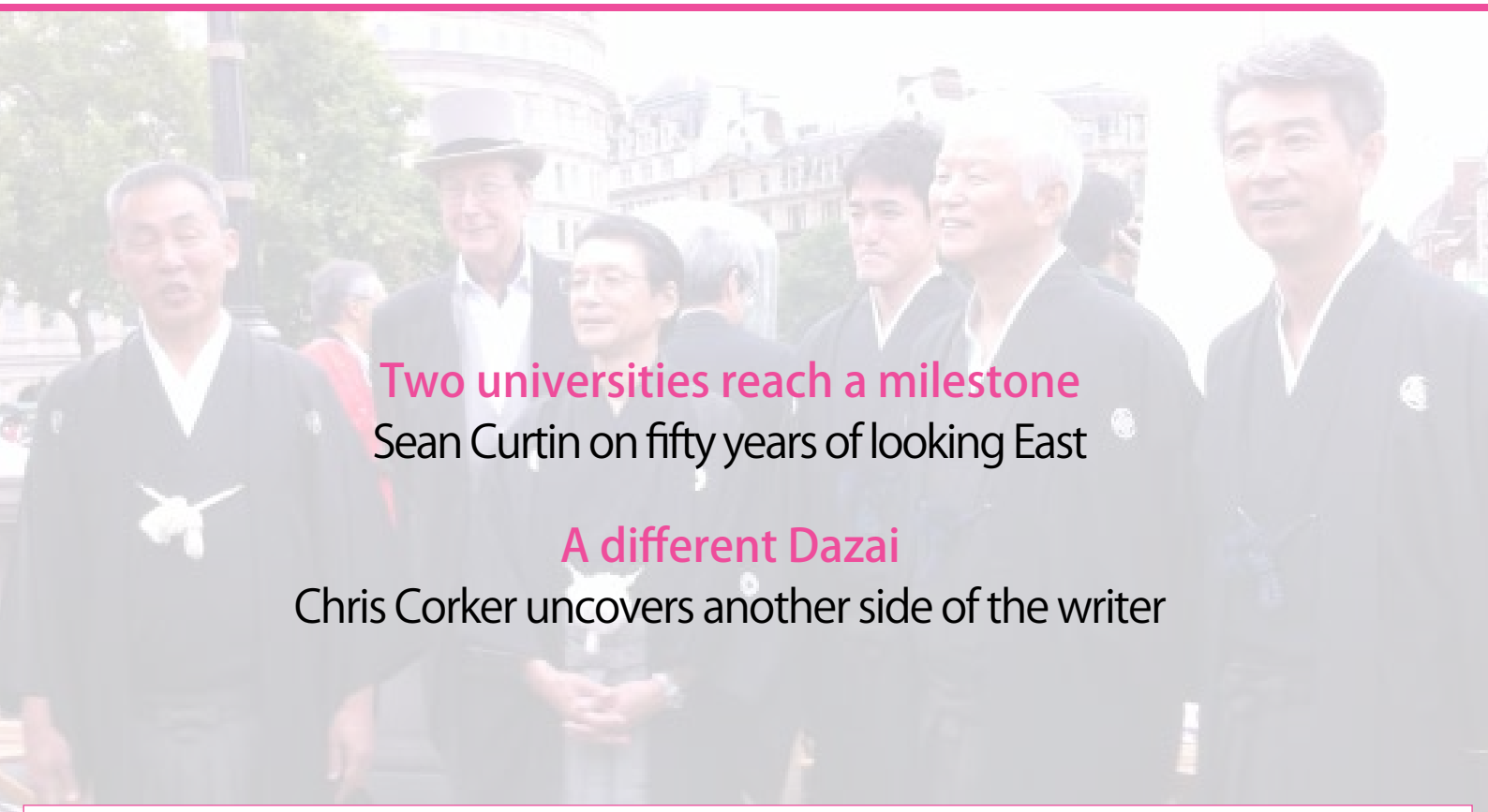


## Two universities reach a milestone

Sean Curtin on fifty years of looking East

## A different Dazai

Chris Corker uncovers another side of the writer

While preparing our final issue of 2013, it was with deep sadness that we learnt of the passing of Sir John Whitehead, distinguished former British Ambassador to Japan (1986 to 1992) and much respected former chairman of the Japan Society (2000 to 2006). Thanks to Sir John's encouragement and kind support, this publication was launched in January 2006. We dedicate this issue to his memory.

In issue 48 we focus on significant Japan-UK anniversaries, during 2013 there were several. The two most prominent ones were the 150th anniversary of the first five Japanese university students to come to the UK, the so-called Choshu Five, and the 400th anniversary of the first official contacts between Japan and Britain, known as Japan400. We have covered both of these in earlier issues and, as the year draws to a close, we mark two other important anniversaries for UK-Japan relations with both Leeds and Sheffield Universities celebrating 50 years of East Asian Studies. In 1963, the University of Sheffield set up the forerunner of the School of East Asian Studies (SEAS) under its renowned founding Professor Geoffrey Bownas. SEAS rapidly established itself as a global centre of excellence for the study of contemporary Japan. At the same time, the frontier explorer Owen Lattimore became the founding professor of what would become the department of East Asian Studies (EAS) at Leeds University. Initially EAS focused on Chinese studies before expanding to include Japanese and Mongolian. Over the past five decades, these two institutions have produced thousands of graduates, many of whom have gone on to work in Japan-related fields, greatly strengthening bilateral ties. The two university departments currently form the White Rose East Asia Centre, a joint collaboration, part of which is the National Institute of Japanese Studies (NIJS). Other articles in this issue include a fascinating review of Dazai Osamu's *Blue Bamboo* and an interesting interview with actress Haruka Abe. Sir Hugh Cortazzi also examines a new book on Japonisme in late nineteenth century Europe.

Sean Curtin, December 2013

## Contents

## Celebrating 50 years of Japanese Studies at the University of Sheffield

Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, Daiwa House, London, Thursday 3 October 2013

Review by Sean Curtin

In 1963, the University of Sheffield was tasked with setting up the Centre for Japanese Studies to advance the study of modern Japan. Under the guidance of its distinguished founding Professor Geoffrey Bownas, it soon established itself as a centre of excellence. By pioneering the combination of practical language skills with social sciences and emphasizing the importance of linguistic and cultural skills in an economic context, Professor Bownas turned the school into a powerhouse for research and study on contemporary Japan. He was also able to expand the curriculum to include other East Asian languages and help introduce Japanese as a dual degree subject. By the 1970s Sheffield boasted the largest Japanese Studies department in the UK and by the time Geoffrey retired in 1980, the School of East Asian Studies (SEAS) was recognized worldwide as a leading research institute. Five decades later, SEAS remains a global leader, being one of the largest and most distinguished departments of its kind in Britain.

To celebrate half a century of achievement, former staff and students were invited to two special golden jubilee events hosted in collaboration with the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation at Daiwa House in London on Thursday 3 October 2013.

Glenn Hook, Professor of Japanese Politics and International Relations at SEAS and Director of the National Institute of Japanese Studies

The feature event was a highly stimulating and well-attended roundtable-type discussion entitled 'Why Japanese Studies? Past, present and future.' It sparked a very lively debate amongst both the panel and audience, generating a thought-provoking session. The panel was made up of five Sheffield-related figures – one for each decade – who between them spanned the period from the founding years to the present. It was chaired by departmental stalwart and renowned scholar Glenn Hook who is Professor of Japanese Politics and International Relations at SEAS. Glenn also serves as the Director of the National Institute of Japanese Studies, which is part of the White Rose East Asia Centre, a collaboration with Leeds University, which is also marking its fiftieth anniversary in 2013.

The distinguished panel also included one of the department's most loyal and long-serving lieutenants, Graham Healey. Just a few years after it was established, Graham joined the then Centre for Japanese Studies as a research student back in 1966, before at least one of his fellow panel members was born. Before coming to Sheffield, he read Chinese at Oxford then studied Japanese language and literature at Waseda University in 1964. Graham became an actual member of staff in 1967, teaching Japanese language, modern history and politics. To the subsequent cohorts of students over the next four decades, he became a very familiar and friendly face, and like Professor Hook greatly contributed to the development and expansion of SEAS. For example, Graham with Dr. Judith Cherry, another long-serving SEAS staff member, established Korean Studies in 1980. In 1995 together with the energetic and affable Alison Churchill, he also set up the highly successful SEAS Distance Learning Programme. Other members of the panel were Hugo Dobson, Professor of Japan's International Relations at SEAS, Dr Mark Pendleton, Lecturer in Japanese Studies and Sir David Warren, British Ambassador to Japan from 2008 to 2012, Chairman of the Japan Society and currently a Visiting Professor at Sheffield.

The Famous Five: Hugo Dobson, Sir David Warren, Glenn Hook, Graham Healey and Mark Pendleton

The second and equally lively part of the celebrations was an extremely well-attended grand reception which united past and present staff and students. The normally spacious Daiwa House was packed to capacity which was perhaps not surprising when one considers the hundreds of graduates SEAS has produced over the past half century. It was a brilliant evening, offering a fantastic opportunity for friends and colleagues to catch up, reminisce and reflect on the considerable achievements of the past 50 years. Many thanks to Jason James and the very welcoming Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation team for offering the venue for a truly memorable 50th Anniversary event.

## 50th Anniversary of East Asian Studies at Leeds University

Review by Sean Curtin

In the autumn of 1963 the fledgling Department of Chinese Studies at Leeds University opened its doors and took in its first batch of students under founding professor and great frontier explorer Owen Lattimore. September 2013 marked fifty years during which time the department has produced over 2000 graduates and morphed into the East Asian Studies (EAS) Department, expanding to include the study of Japanese and Mongolian. Today it also offers Thai, South East Asian and Asia-Pacific Studies.

To properly celebrate its Golden Jubilee, the department set up a series of lectures, talks and activities. The crowning event being a huge Anniversary Reception of former students and staff held on Friday 25 October in the university's spacious Parkinson Court. The regal venue brought together five amazing decades of the department's rich and diverse history in a singular unforgettable event. Staff and students from the founding and subsequent decades seamlessly intermingled with current undergraduates and staff along with representatives from the Japanese, Chinese, Mongolian and other embassies as well as many VIPs and distinguished guests.

There were a series of speeches anchored by the energetic Professor Caroline Rose, current departmental head and driving force behind the celebrations. The University's Vice Chancellor, Sir Alan Langlands, launched the proceedings and introduced department legend Professor Don Rimmington, one of the original 1960s members of staff and a much respected former head of department. He gave a fascinating overview of the last fifty years, outlining the various challenges and highlights of the department's dramatic history and many achievements. For some in the audience, including myself, listening to Don once more at the lectern briefly transported us back in time to our undergraduate days in the 1980s or 1970s, and for a few listeners even further back. Next up was Don's dynamic successor at the helm, the renowned scholar Professor Delia Davin. She entertained the crowd with several colourful stories of life as a student at Leeds in the 1960s. These two much-loved former heads encompassed over four decades of the department's history with Don's career dating from its inception and Delia's spanning up to her retirement in 2004.

Former EAS department heads Professor Don Rimmington and Professor Delia Davin with graduates and their children

Moving away from former members of staffs, the microphone was handed to Leeds graduate Andrew Seaton, a former British Consul-General to Hong Kong & Macao and veteran diplomat. Professor Rose, Director of East Asian Studies, then rounded off the speeches, reflecting on her own two decade-long association with the department. The speakers on the stage only represented a minute fraction of the illustrious gathering of past East Asian Studies personas at the reception, which included other departmental icons like Professor Brian Hook, another long-serving original 1960s member of staff and colleague of founding father and explorer Owen Lattimore.

Professor Brian Hook, one of the 1960s team, with former students

The Anniversary Reception amazingly managed to momentarily capture the multifaceted strands of five decades of East Asian Studies at Leeds. It was also an incredibly enjoyable evening and a fitting way to mark fifty years of outstanding achievement.

Many former students, some of whom had met their partners at Leeds, brought their children to the

department on Saturday for the open day where graduate offspring got a chance to roam the spacious corridors and do a range of activities – and perhaps also demonstrate that it may not just be salmon who need to return to their spawning ground. It was a pleasant experience for many former class mates to meet up and let their children all enjoy a fun-packed day with current EAS staff and students.

One especially popular attraction was the display of class graduation photos from the 1960s to the present day which brightly decorated the walls of the department. These allowed children to glimpse youthful-looking versions of their parents in period fashions, while graduates could marvel at how young their former professors once looked. In the nearby Parkinson Court enthusiastic undergraduates performed Beijing Opera, Thai dances and Japanese pop songs. There was also a range of talks on Chinese culture, Owen Lattimore and department history plus some outstanding exhibitions. For the more energetically inclined a team of current EAS students raced around a brave Alumni team in a 7-a-side East Asian Studies football match. All in all, it was an absolute brilliant weekend which successfully incorporated every strand of the five decade-long intricate EAS tapestry. Professor Caroline Rose and her fantastic team deserve our upmost thanks for organizing such an unforgettable and exhilarating event.

Children of former students get to do a range of activities during open day


## Blue Bamboo by Dazai Osamu

translated by Ralph McCarthy

Kurodahan Press, 2012

220 Pages

ISBN: 490207558X

Review by Chris Corker

This collection of short stories, released recently through the still relatively young Kurodhahan Press, can be seen as a quaint but pleasant divergence from the narrative and themes that fans of Dazai will be familiar with. While readers of the previously released *Crackling Mountain and Other Stories* may find something familiar here (as with *Crackling Mountain* there is another retelling of a story by Ihara Saikaku), others will no doubt be pleasantly surprised by the whimsical tone and light-hearted humour of the stories contained.

First, a note on the presentation. The cover is pleasantly subtle – and of course very Japanese – and the matte finish of the cover combined with the thickness of the pages are a nice change from the mass-produced, glossy paperbacks that are so common nowadays. In a market where effort only seems to be taken with hardbacks, it's nice to own a paperback that doesn't leave you feeling as though you have purchased something that is best disposed of after reading, before it falls apart of its own volition.

At the start of this collection is a foreword by the translator, Ralph McCarthy. Set in a familiar and easy-to-read tone, this section is used to give a little background to the stories, as well as explaining his reasoning for including each. While not overly long, I found this section answered most of the questions I might have had after reading. It was also refreshingly honest about some of the short-comings of certain stories, despite his obvious fondness for others. The translation itself is very clear and straightforward, suffering from none of the awkward structure and bizarre phrasing that used to plague translated works.

*On Love and Beauty* and *Lanterns of Romance* are both stories that are centred on a particular family. In a mirror of Dazai's own childhood (it's interesting to note that the father figure in these stories is dead, while Dazai was never on good terms with his own father), the family are rather well-to-do and their main challenge in life seems to be their struggle with an ever-encroaching boredom. In order to combat this they gather to pool their imaginative resources and create a story. Through this narrative, each of the characters' personality traits, desires and fears are revealed as they

present themselves bare and vicariously through their protagonist. I would agree with the translator when he says that he would have liked to have seen more of this household in further stories. It's a shame that they only get these two brief outings.

The next two stories, *The Chrysanthemum Spirit* and *The Samurai and the Mermaid*, deal with man's pride, obstinacy and the Samurai notion of honour. These themes are shown later in the book, but nowhere are they as pronounced as they are here. *The Chrysanthemum Spirit*, which takes the form of a classic fairy tale, tells the story of a man who is so proud of his skills that he refuses to be helped by anyone else, while *The Samurai and the Mermaid* highlights the importance of honour to the Samurai. When Konnai is accused of lying about his defeat of a mermaid to his face, his need to prove his tale and clear his besmirched name consumes him. This story is enjoyable as, despite its serious and finally morbid tone, it retains the narrative drive of a fairy tale, always maintaining the importance of fantasy. This is highlighted in the following speech by a supporter of the protagonist:

'To a true Samurai, trust is everything. He who will not believe without seeing is a pitiful excuse for a man. Without trust, how can one know what is real and what is not? Indeed, one may see and yet not believe – is this not the same as never seeing? Is not everything, then, no more than an immaterial dream?'

This line, rife with the Zen ideology that was utilised by the Samurai in their Bushido code is concluded with a phrase that the reader cannot help but see with a little irony.

'. . . thus ends this story affirming certain victory for those with the power to believe.'

This line is brilliantly juxtaposed with the tone of the story, creating an unnerving climax that feels less like a true ending and more like the naive, wishful thinking of a child. Another inclusion that takes the form of a classic story, *Romanesque*, uses a more conventional approach to the telling of a fairy tale, but also ends in peculiar introspection that purposely betrays the conventions that have preceded it.

*Blue Bamboo* – despite its fantastical themes – and *Alt Heidelberg*, feel very autobiographical in nature. The first deals with a man who feels worthless no matter how much he drives up the determination to succeed, and is eventually tempted away from his unpleasant life by an implausible fantasy. The second is a good example of the classic nostalgic tale, where the rose tint falls away on a return to a favourite place of childhood. Both of these act as good insights into Dazai's personal feelings and bear some resemblance to his better known works, such as *No Longer Human* and *The Setting Sun*.

While it may be difficult to find an obvious common theme among all of these stories, many of them contain Dazai's idiosyncrasies and give insights into his own life. Some are undoubtedly weaker than the others but they are still, each of them, enjoyable on their own merits. There is nothing earth-shatteringly insightful here, but there is plenty of reticent philosophy and gentle adventure that can be enjoyed by all.

## Haruka Abe – Interview with an Actress

Interview by Mike Sullivan


Haruka Abe is originally from Tokyo, after attending high school in Tokyo she was about to enter Aoyama University when she made the decision to move to London and attend a drama school. She graduated with a 1st class Bachelor of Arts degree and in a relatively short number of years she has starred in award winning short films, had recurring roles in a number of TV programmes and will soon be on the big screen in 47 Ronin, which also stars Keanu Reeves, Koh Shibasaki, Hiroyuki Sanada and Tadanobu Asano. In 2014 she will appear in an ITV comedy drama called Edge of Heaven alongside a number of other independent feature movies. We were very lucky to have the chance to meet her and ask her a few questions about her background and work.

Please tell us about your upcoming role in the movie 47 Ronin, and how it felt to be part of a big production featuring so many Japanese actors/actresses as well as Keanu Reeves

My character is a handmaiden who serves the princess of Ako, a fictional character played by Koh Shibasaki. It's a small role but I got to film in Budapest and in London which was fantastic. It was the most amazing experience to work with some of the finest actors in Japan. I got to work closely with Koh-san who is one of the most incredible people I've ever met, and working with Sanada-san was truly inspiring. He cares so much about his art and about Japanese culture. It was an honour to work with such a talented team.

Could you tell us about your background? For example, when did you first know you wanted to become an actress?

I was born in Tokyo, moved between New York, London and Tokyo as a child with my family, and moved back to London on my own to go to a drama school. I always wanted to become an actor or a painter (or a

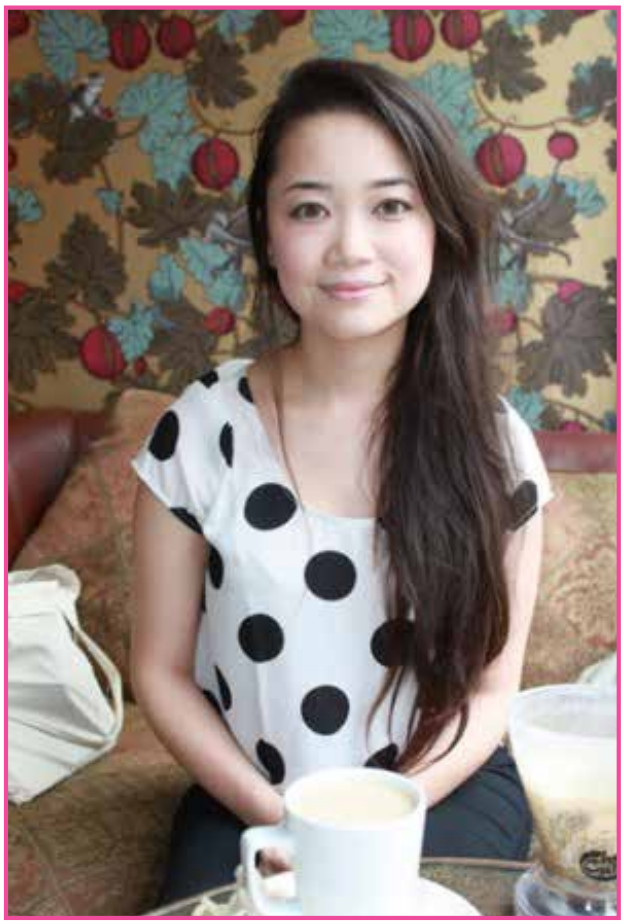
mermaid), but the moment I knew for sure was when I played Bilbo Baggins in my school production of The Hobbit when I was nine.

What is the scariest part of an audition?

I always think that being an actor is like constantly falling in love. Nine out of ten times, you fall in love with the character, you pour your heart out in the audition, only to be told they don't want you, and it breaks your heart. But on the rare occasion when they turn around and say, 'I pick you', you get to have the time of your life. I guess the scariest part of an audition is the fact that no matter how much you love your character you may not be able to play him or her. But what's the fun of being in love without a little challenge, right?

What was the first TV or film that you ever did?

I think it was a BBC3 sitcom called IDEAL. I played Miko, a giggly Japanese girl who is a guitarist in a hard-core rock band. I had to air-guitar and go crazy in the audition. It was just for one episode initially but it turned into a semi-regular role appearing in all 5 series. The cast and crew were all fantastic to work with and it was the best 'first job' I could have hoped for.



Do you prefer acting for film or TV?

I love both! TV is very fast paced and you really need to be on top of everything. You could be juggling many episodes at a time and really need to know where your character is – at which point in which script. With films you generally get more time to get to know your script, and rehearse etc. For me it's all down to the script and the character I get to play, whether it's TV or film. I love getting to know the cast and crew, so the more time on set the better!

What is the most embarrassing or unexpected thing that has happened to you when filming a scene?

A pigeon flew into the back of my head once. I did not see that one coming!

It's not filming, but when I was performing the aforementioned school play, The Hobbit, I forgot to get back on stage after the break between the first and the second act, and my poor class-mates were on stage going, 'Where's Bilbo? Where's Bilbo?' for a good five minutes. In my defence, the teacher didn't say my name when she was calling out for the cast members who were meant to be in the beginning of the second act. 'You're Bilbo! You're in EVERY scene!' said the teacher upon finding me munching on biscuits and watching TV in the classroom.

It seems like you enjoy taking on challenging roles, for the short movies Precision and Pulling Away everything had to be completed within 40 and 100 hours respectively, how difficult was that?

I do enjoy a good challenge! We also wrote, shot and edited Choose within 48 hours (well, the team did). I love just jumping into the scene and being in the 'moment'. With guerrilla style shoots you don't have the luxury of being in a controlled environment and doing take after take, and you have to really focus, be creative and get the shots in the can, which is challenging but fun. Long hours doesn't bother me at all, time flies when you're having fun.

Pulling Away addressed the subject of Japanese people who refuse to leave their bedroom or house, which for many people it is hard to understand. How hard, or easy, was it to identify with this kind of character?

I'm quite a shy person so I can easily go on for days without speaking to anybody and I have been in that place where you are so heartbroken that you feel like not caring anymore. So yes, I could identify with that state of mind. I think it's quite easy to slip into that state of lethargy or vulnerability if you allow yourself to.

Stanley Pickle was an incredible stop motion movie, how difficult was it to be filmed in this way?

Filming Stanley Pickle was challenging as pixilation is a very physically demanding process. It was all shot on a stills camera, and we had to move one inch at a time, sometimes holding a very difficult position for quite a while. I used to dance and I also trained in physical theatre which helped. Also, when the character goes through a range of emotions, you have to break it down accordingly, so that it flows naturally when everything is put together. It was quite a hypnotic experience as the world around you goes by at normal speed while your world moves in slow motion.

Have you acted in anything in Japan? What do you think are the differences between being an actress in Japan and in the UK?

I used to train in Gekidan Himawari, a children's drama school in Tokyo. So I have been in a few NHK dramas playing small parts when I was little. I think there is a big difference between being an actress in Japan and in the UK, but I can go on and on about it and it might not be that interesting! The industries seem completely different, from training to audition process to working hours.

What do you think is the biggest challenge to being a Japanese actress in the UK?

There just aren't enough opportunities that are open to Japanese actors. Luckily I am seen for, and sometimes cast in, non-Japanese/race specific roles but it is still very hard. You really need to start making your own work so that you're not just sitting around waiting for the right role to come knocking on your door.

After 47 Ronin what can we expect to see you in next?

I have a small recurring part in a new ITV comedy drama called Edge of Heaven, which starts airing in spring 2014. There are also a couple of independent feature films coming out in 2014 too. Hopefully there are more things I can share with everyone very soon.

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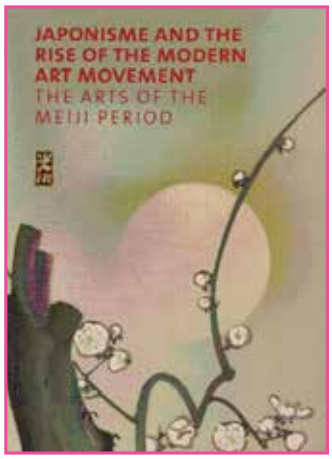
## Japonisme and the Rise of the Modern Art Movement

## by Frederik I. Schodt




Thames and Hudson, 2013

240 Pages

ISBN: 978 0 500 239131

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

This handsome and finely illustrated volume is introduced by Gregory Irvine of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Irvine heads his introduction with a quotation from a letter from Vincent van Gogh to his brother in which van Gogh wrote, 'In a way all my work is founded on Japanese art.'

Axel Kruge contributes a chapter on 'Vincent van Gogh and Japan', John House writes about 'Impressionism and Japan' and Kim Schiermeier discusses 'Imitation or Innovation? van Gogh's Japonaiserie and Japanese Art of the Meiji Period.'

This book is, however, much more than another book on Japonisme in late nineteenth century Europe. Gregory Irvine describes the way in which Japanese art objects reached the west in a chapter headed 'From Namban to Meiji: The Availability and Reception of Japanese Art in Europe during the Meiji Period.' Hiroko Yokomizu describes in another chapter 'The Presentation and Reception of Japanese Art in Europe during the Meiji Period' and Tayfun Belgin discusses 'Viennese Japonisme: From the Figured-Perspective to the Ornamental-Extensive Style.' This reminds readers that while Japaonisme may have originated in Paris and London Japanese art objects were popular throughout Europe.

In the Meiji period art products constituted a significant element in Japanese exports to western countries. The Japanese government made various efforts to promote such exports as one way of reducing Japan's trade deficit with the West.

The market in Japan for Japanese works of art shrank as the social order was radically altered and the craze for western objects dominated society in Tokyo. Japanese artists, however, were able to keep and develop their skills by producing objects for the European and American markets as well as for sale to the globe trotters, who came in increasing numbers to Japanese shores and sought ever more souvenirs. The artists and craftsmen quickly learnt what sort of items appealed to Victorian taste. Much of what they produced went to help fill the cluttered rooms of the newly rich European middle classes.

Some of the items they produced were elaborate and highly decorated and conformed more to what might be termed Nikko Toshogu style rather than exquisite Kyoto refinement, but there could be no doubt about the fine workmanship and attention to detail which they displayed in their products.

This bronze of mythological figures dating from 1881 shows how much time and effort must have

been put into so many pieces of Japanese metalwork designed for the European market:

Personally I prefer something in more restrained taste, such as this lacquer box made in 1910 and belonging to

the Khalili collection (plate 27), which is a fine example of traditional Japanese lacquer making skills:

In the chapters showing the influence of Japanese art on impressionist painters, examples of paintings by such famous artists as Manet, Degas, Monet, Whistler and van Gogh are juxtaposed with Japanese wood block prints to show how the impressionists adopted styles and composition inspired by Japanese originals. Monet's bridge over the lily pond is for instance juxtaposed with a Hiroshige print of the curved bridge at Kameido shrine in Edo. The most famous example of imitation by a western artist of a Japanese print is probably van Gogh's copy of a Hiroshige print:

This is a book, which will interest all who want to learn about Japanese art exports in the nineteenth century, and who wonder in what ways Japanese art, especially wood block prints, influenced western artists in 19th century Europe.

I have one complaint. Who on earth chose to have this book printed in such a pale script? The printing is so lacking in black ink that it requires a major effort to read the script even under a strong light.Tokugawa Akitake who was representing his uncle, the last of the Tokugawa Shoguns, at the exposition. Their acts included the butterfly trick, top spinning, rope dancing, ladder acts and various other acrobatic feats. In London they ran into some competition from another Japanese troupe known as the Gensui troupe who reached London before them.

The Japanese attracted a lot of attention especially when they wore Japanese clothing. Western languages and customs seemed strange to them and their belongings were sometimes stolen or lost in fires. They and Risley were occasionally involved in disputes which came to court. The members of the troupe did not bring their wives and often visited prostitutes.

After two years abroad and visits to Spain and Portugal, eight members of the troupe returned to Japan. Nine remained with Risley in the US and revisited Britain where they again ran into competition from the *Royal Tycoon* group led by Tannakker Buhicroson whose 'Japanese Village' in Knightsbridge was the main theme in my book *Japan in Late Victorian London: The Japanese Village in Knightsbridge and the Mikado, 1885* (SISJAC, Norwich, 2009 – and reviewed in issue 23, November 2009). The group gradually parted company. Risley returned to the United States and was eventually committed to a lunatic asylum where he died in May 1874.

Schodt's book is based on meticulous research and his account of Risley's life and of Japanese acrobats and entertainers in the US and Europe in the late 1860s will fascinate readers interested in the spread of Japanese popular culture abroad.