In this issue we focus on various aspects of the Japanese movie industry with some stimulating reviews of recent books. Michael Sullivan examines *All the Emperor’s Men* which charts the legendary director Akira Kurosawa’s incursion into Hollywood. In an in-depth book Hiroshi Tasogawa details Kurosawa’s traumatic involvement in a fractious partnership with 20th Century Fox. Kurosawa was slated to direct *Tora Tora Tora*, which was supposed to tell the story of Pearl Harbor from both a Japanese and American perspective. However, miscommunication, cultural misunderstandings and completely different working practices crippled the production. Next Roger Macy casts a critical eye on Jasper Sharp’s encyclopedic work *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema*. Sharp produces a comprehensive study of Japanese cinema, with some 320 pages devoted to selected main entries, and the remainder to the fact-packed appendices. We next look at the fascinating *World Film Locations: Tokyo* edited by Chris MaGee with contributions from 18 writers including MaGee himself. This book takes us on an eighty-year historical journey of movie making in the capital. The wonderful thing about film is its power to preserve a world that no longer exists and this volume allows the reader to glimpse the ghosts of Tokyo past. Along with several articles the work covers 45 scenes from different movies that have featured Tokyo along with photos, maps and a short description. The first section covers the period 1929–1960, which I found particularly enlightening, taking the reader back to prewar Tokyo. For example, one surviving movie fragment from 1929 shows lively vistas of the capital that vanished long ago. In the section covering 1961 to 1978 the reader witnesses the metamorphosis to mega-metropolis and there are also vivid reminders of major events in Tokyo’s history such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Fumiko Halloran looks at a thought-provoking book on the international Japanese movie star Yoshiko Yamaguchi who was popular not only in Hollywood but also in both Japan and China from the 1930s to 1950s. Fluent in Mandarin and trained by a Russian opera singer, Yamaguchi lived a complicated life with several identities. In a gripping memoir *My Life as Li Xianglan*, Yamaguchi tells of the terrible conflicts she faced with a career spanning both China and Japan at a time of conflict. Susan Meehan gives us her take on *Bonsái*, the award-winning Chilean movie directed by Cristián Jiménez. The narrative flips back and forth over an eight year period; initially centering on the university romance between Julio and Emilia. *Bonsái* is a youthful and whimsical production inspired by literature with Proust especially looming large. The movie has what the director calls a ‘Japanese sensibility.’ We next glide into the increasingly popular movie/book realm with a look at Keigo Higashino’s novel *The Devotion of Suspect X* which was also a highly successful 2008 movie directed by Hiroshi Nishitani, starring Shinichí Tsutsumi and Yasuko Matsuyuki. The prize-winning author Keigo Higashino perfectly illustrates the current trend of successful novels being transformed into hit movies and the blurring of the boundary between the movie and book worlds.

Sean Curtin, August 2012
All the Emperor’s Men
by Hiroshi Tasogawa
Applause Books, November 2012
336 pages, $29.99 / ¥2,770
ISBN: 155783850

Review by Michael Sullivan

In a career spanning over 50 years Akira Kurosawa (黒澤明) directed over 30 movies, in all likelihood everyone has seen at least one of his movies, whether it is the epic *Ran* (乱) or the classic *Seven Samurai* (七人の侍).

He was a huge influence on the history of cinema and in 1990 he was awarded the Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement. In this book Hiroshi Tasogawa details a period of Kurosawa’s life during which he was involved in the 20th Century Fox production of *Tora Tora Tora* (トラトラトラ). It was envisioned that this movie would tell the story of Pearl Harbor from a Japanese perspective and from an American perspective. However, when it came to shooting the movie Kurosawa was dismissed within weeks and the movie subsequently completed by different directors.

In the months that followed it became apparent that there was no clear answer to what had happened as different sources claimed that Kurosawa had been sick, hadn’t been sick, betrayed or even ousted by a Hollywood conspiracy.

Hiroshi Tasogawa graduated from Waseda University in 1958, he has been a reporter for NHK and the Associated Press, and was a professor of media at Tokai University. During the two years of Kurosawa’s involvement in *Tora Tora Tora* Tasogawa worked as an interpreter for Kurosawa as well as a translator of the screenplay. In this book he details the events of those years and attempts to shed light on why this partnership ultimately failed and why all those involved ended up with a different idea of what went wrong.

The book describes all the facts in vivid detail and serves as bit of a window into the mind of a great director like Kurosawa, it also considers the inherent miscommunication that can occur between two very different cultures such as the East and the West as well as how different methods of working can lead to great misunderstandings. A lot of the book details the build-up to the shooting of the movie and the amount of work put in by Kurosawa, as we follow events along two important facts become clear: Kurosawa saw this as a chance not only to present the Japanese version of events but also to present the tragedy of admiral Yamamoto (Commander-in-chief of the Japanese Navy), and that while Hollywood appreciated the films that Kurosawa had directed, they hadn’t actually done a lot of research on his work methods. This would prove to be a fatal flaw, especially when the producers and 20th Century Fox representatives were faced with behaviour and shooting delays which seemed crazy. Further flaws in the partnership become clear when Tasogawa looks at the contract and reveals how what Kurosawa thought was his role and what 20th Century Fox were actually expecting him to do were quite different on some very key points including overall direction, editing and even whether this was a co-production or a purely 20th Century Fox production.

This book describes in great detail the huge amount of work that had to be done before a movie could even reach the stage of shooting, it is a real revelation on aspects such as the screenplay, casting, budget and especially the heart and soul that Kurosawa put into it. It is a real page turner, and in particular the insight into Kurosawa’s character has left me wanting to watch his movies again in order to better understand the man behind the movie, and to watch *Tora Tora Tora* again in order to consider for myself what the movie might have been like with some of the cut scenes described in Tasogawa’s book, which within a Japanese perspective of the events that led up to Pearl Harbor would have presented Kurosawa’s depiction of the tragedy of admiral Yamamoto.

It seems that many problems can arise not only between two very different cultures using different languages, but also from a basic level between a director who was an artist and a film company that was a business. In the end the film *Tora Tora Tora* which was completed didn’t include scenes that Kurosawa felt were key to the story and we can only wonder what could have been if he had managed to stay in the director's chair.

Tasogawa makes it clear that he can see the irony that a movie about the many misunderstandings that took place before and during Pearl Harbor would itself suffer a similar series of misunderstandings.

Note


A film poster for *Tora Tora Tora*
Let me introduce you to a cultural curiosity: the Japanese film industry. It has no links, isn't bulky and heavy, and is pretty much all the work of one person. Scarecrow Press have published scores of imprints in their ‘Historical Dictionary’ series, many of which are on the subjects of filmography of various countries of the internet era, with many specialist databases thriving alongside general encyclopedias such as Wikipedia. It shows considerable courage to invest in a single-shot print publication of a dictionary or encyclopedia, which needs to be authoritative, but which presents itself with thousands of opportunities to get things wrong or out of date. ‘Thousands’ is a considerable understatement of the risk of error. Of the 520 pages in Sharp’s volume on Japanese cinema, some 320 are devoted to the main entries and the remainder to the appendices. The appendices include over a hundred pages of listings of organizations, individuals, films and terms– each first English rendering included with Japanese script and romaji (Japanese expressed in the Latin alphabet) alongside. Finally, there is a 98-page bibliography. This format of self-envelope calculation suggests the opportunities for error-in-detail are of the order of 100,000, nearly all of which have been avoided.

But for all the nobility of such a pains-taking cause, a reviewer has to ask, in the third millennium, as to whether a Historical Dictionary in print-form can ever again serve a scholar. For printed listings, they can only serve the entire filmography of 150 or so directors. The listings are indexed back to the appendices, which are not alphabetically by author of the commentaries. That makes eminent sense in a monograph where names and subjects are indexed, but leaves these pieces virtually unfindable unless the work is already known. This leaves me to be ascribed the remainder opportunity. Indices by commentaries by film have filled a real gap. Many of these quibbles clearly relate to common organisational themes of the series and cannot be ascribed to the author. Areas where Sharp has clearly deployed his considerable knowledge to effect is the listing of ‘other figures.’ For instance MORI Iwao (森英和) is ‘Toho production head,’ MORI Masayuki (森昌行) is ‘Producer’ but MORI Katsuyuki (森昌行) is ‘former SMAP member.’ That last meant nothing to me, but ‘SMAP’ duly gets its own entry. I learnt which talent agency developed this idiosyncratic group, although I can’t remember the companies developed. That’s the kind of detail that doesn’t appear in other English-language books. It is probably in the show-business history that Sharp’s contribution is most valuable. He has devoted entries to some of the more famous ‘classic’ directors but the format doesn’t allow him to say anything new, and doesn’t point towards any key works by others. Actors and other personnel, on the other hand, are much better served here than by other English language publications, particularly for the current generation.

But, alas, it seems Japanese media companies are still charging too much for simple still photos for use in publications, particularly for the current generation. That has to serve a range of readers, some who might come to it with a surface interest in film but little knowledge of Japanese industry, and others who might be disappointed that Sharp could not find space for the raccoons (tanuki) fought to protect the shrinking human habitation and tells the fiction tale of the fight. This Studio Ghibli movie was based on a real life area which would feature in the James Bond movie You Only Live Twice as the headquarters of an evil organisation. From personal experience from the restaurants at the top of this building there is still a lovely view of Tokyo as well as the nearby Akasaka Palace. Another moment from cinema history is shown in the 1971 movie Throw Away Your Books and Rally In The Streets, in the 1960s protests by the nation’s youths were common and this movie shows the chaos in the streets.

As can be expected the final journey of Tokyo’s capital brings us to the most recent, as well as the nearby Akasaka Palace. Another moment from cinema history is shown in the 1971 movie Throw Away Your Books and Rally In The Streets, in the 1960s protests by the nation’s youths were common and this movie shows the chaos in the streets.

Another strength of Sharp’s Dictionary is censorship. It is inclusion in 1995 of decision-making on the Japanese side before Hiroshima was the work of scriptwriter Ishidō Toshirō. The important entry for the ‘Manei’ company provides further war-time details but, as for the statement that the bulk of its local output was destroyed during the Soviet invasion, with what remains in China’s Film Archives or at Changchun Studio, thereby essentially lost to Japanese researchers – that needs qualification in respect of the recoveries from Gosfilm, listed in the NFC newsletter number 61 of 2005.

The policy on rendering Japanese into romanji is explained and consistent. I soon got used to seeing all names with macrons, and all places without. The accuracy is generally far beyond my level of detection, although I believe Ishihara Yūjiro should have two macrons. Jasper Sharp has worked assiduously in an unyielding format and you would have to be very well-read not to mine new information from this resource.

World Film Locations:
Tokyo, edited by Chris MaGee
Intellect, October 2012
128 pages, £11.50
ISBN 1841504831
Review by Michael Sullivan
For any fan of Japanese cinema and with time to spare in Tokyo, this book is a must as it charts a journey of eighty years of movies being filmed in the great capital city of Japan. The editor Chris MaGee, who is the editor of the Toronto J-Film Pow-Wow Japanese film blog in Canada, includes contributions from 17 other scholars in his book, which is covered from different movies that have featured Tokyo along with photos, maps and a short description. There are also several articles which focus on different aspects of Japanese cinema.

The first section covers the period 1929-1960, in the description of each example scene we are also taken on a journey through cinema history, for example the editor notes how much footage is lost from before 1945 due to the highly flammable nitrate used for film stock, the damage Tokyo suffered in World War II and the films that were burned in the post war period by American censors. One surviving fragment of a 1943 movie ‘Shiba Kaidō’ T Judge Hisashi’s scenes of a Tokyo that has long since disappeared. It is only in the 1950s that more films exist which show buildings of the city that can still be seen today, one amusing example is the clock of the Wako Department Store in Ginza which features in the 1954 movie Gōzūra (Gorija) and which doesn’t escape destruction.

From 1961 to 1978 we are given vivid reminders of major events in Tokyo’s history starting with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the route taken by the marathon runners which can be seen in Tokyo Olympiad. In conjunction with the Olympics the New Otani hotel in Chiyoda was built and opened in 1964, at this time this was the tallest building in Tokyo and three years later it would feature in the James Bond movie You Only Live Twice as the headquarters of an evil organisation. From personal experience from the restaurants at the top of this building there is still a lovely view of Tokyo as well as the nearby Akasaka Palace. An additional moment from cinema history is shown in the 1971 movie Throw Away Your Books and Rally In The Streets, in the 1960s protests by the nation’s youths were common and this movie shows the chaos in the streets.

The third section starts to bring this overview of Tokyo movie scenes up to date as the period 1979-1999 is included. Not only is there a main entry of some length but there are seven articles which focus on different aspects of the city. It is only in 1995 of decision-making on the Japanese side before Hiroshima was the work of scriptwriter Ishidō Toshirō. The important entry for the ‘Manei’ company provides further war-time details but, as for the statement that the bulk of its local output was destroyed during the Soviet invasion, with what remains in China’s Film Archives or at Changchun Studio, thereby essentially lost to Japanese researchers – that needs qualification in respect of the recoveries from Gosfilm, listed in the NFC newsletter number 61 of 2005.

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from Pachinko parlours, bridges, bookshops and fish markets are shown, and of course all can be still seen today. For anyone interested in Japanese cinema and television, this book is a must-buy. Not only does cinema bring a city to life, but it is a pleasure to see the same places with your own eyes.

My Life as Li Xianlan (李香蘭)を生きて)

by Yamaguchi Yoshiko

Nihon Keizai Shim bun, 2004

241 pages, ¥1600

Review by Fumiko Halloran

Yamaguchi Yoshiko was a prominent movie star and singer from the late 1930’s to 1958 when she married a Japanese diplomat and retired from a successful but controversial career. She was popular not only in Japan but in China, Hong Kong, and Hollywood.

The dramatic life she describes in this memoir illustrates the fate of a beautiful and talented girl who grew up in Manchuria when Japan established a puppet state there in 1932. Fluent in Mandarin and trained by a popular not only in Japan but in China, Hong Kong, and Hollywood.

Over the years in China, Japan, and America, she had five names with different identities. She suffered from emotional conflicts, according to this memoir, particularly as Li Xianlan, the Chinese star, which hid her true identity as a Japanese. As she rose toward stardom, Yamaguchi seemed unaware of the consequences of political storms around her. She was keenly aware, however, of the Japanese military’s attitude toward the Chinese and was hurt by both Japanese mistreatment of Chinese and the hostility of the Chinese toward Japanese. When she went to Japan for the first time when she was eighteen years old, she was shocked by Japanese contempt and condescension toward Chinese even though her singing of Chinese songs was popular.

During the year Yamaguchi was born, Mao Zedong governed China with an iron fist. When she appeared in movies, she played the roles of many Japanese and Chinese characters. She admired both countries and tried to cooperate with the Japanese government and military while fighting the Chinese communists. Her best friend, a Russian girl with whom she maintained a lifelong friendship, turned out to have a father who was a Soviet Communist Party member working for Pravda and Tass, the Soviet publications.

Yamaguchi, as Li Xianlan, was named Japan’s Manchurian Goodwill Ambassador as she was propelled to stardom with movies including Leaving a Good Name for Posterity about the Opium War. It was produced in Shanghai by a joint venture between Japanese and Chinese as Japanese propaganda. The head of the Shanghai company, Kawakita Nagamasa, was a veteran in the film industry and chose themes that passed Japanese military censorship but appealed to Chinese audiences. In this movie, the Chinese understood that British colonial ambitions in China had been parallel to modern Japanese ambitions. General Lin Zouyu, who fought against British colonial ambitions, had been a countryman of Li Xianlan. She played the role of the Chinese star.

Yamaguchi writes that she almost confessed that she was Japanese. But the pressure on her not to disclose her true identity had been applied by different interest groups who had used her all a political purpose. She apologized to the journalists and pledged not to be involved in such movies again.

She writes movingly about her visits to war zones in 1942. At that time she was working on an epic movie, The Yellow River, which took place near the frontline in Henan Province. Financed by the Manchurian Film Group who had used her all a Chinese production. During the filming, the cast was in danger of being caught in the cross fire between the Japanese army and the Kuomintang or Communist Chinese forces. The theme was village life near the river in a place about to become a battlefield. When the production company left, Yamaguchi and another actress helped the medics attend to the wounded throughout the night. When the train stopped, even the dying soldiers wanted her to sing, so she jumped off the train and stood in a wheat field under the moonlight and sang old Japanese songs for the soldiers.

Having gone through pain of conflict between the Chinese and Japanese, and carrying a sense of guilt that her work as actress and singer had supported Japan’s behavior toward China, Yamaguchi watched from Tokyo the signing ceremony in Beijing establishing diplomatic relations between Japan and the People’s Republic of China in the fall of 1972-and cried. Today she calls China her fatherland and Japan as motherland and has a simple message: ‘Stop war.’
account for his indifference towards Blanca? Will his bonsai survive?

Jimenez has said that the film pays tribute to lies, fiction and the artificial and that it is full of jokes and music. Did Blanca realise Julio was lying about working for Gazmuri at any point and did Emilia lie when she said she’d read Proust? Jimenez hadn’t always counted on being a novelist, having toyed with the ambition of being a comedian. He certainly sounds as though he’d be convivial company.

The Devotion of Suspect X

by Keigo Higashino (translated by Alexander O. Smith with Elye J. Alexander)

Abacus, 2011
440 pages, £7.99
ISBN: 0349123748

Review by Michael Sullivan

Keigo Higashino  is one of Japan’s most popular novelists, having written over 50 novels and won numerous awards. In 2006 he won the 134th Naoki Prize and the 6th Honkaku Mystery Grand Prize for his novel, The Devotion of Suspect X, which had been published the previous year. He has been writing since 1985 and has had numerous books, essays and children’s stories published, many of which have been adapted for TV dramas and movies. In 2008 the movie of The Devotion of Suspect X was released, it was directed by Hiroshi Nishitani and starred Shinichi Tsutsumi and Yasuko Matsuyuki. This was the third highest grossing film of 2008 and featured the continuation of the same characters (and actors) from the 2007 TV drama Galileo, which was also based on another book by Keigo Higashino.

Tetsuya Ishigami is a teacher, regarded as a mathematical genius in his school years he now teaches unmotivated school kids while living a very simple life. He has an unrequited infatuation with his neighbour, but as no one seems to notice, and he isn’t willing to pursue it, it remains relatively innocent. His neighbour Yasuko Hanaoka is a single mother living with her teenage daughter Misato, after having moved several times to escape from an abusive ex-husband. Having previously worked as a hostess, she now works at a local bento shop. However, her ex husband, Shinji Togashi, isn’t finished with her and he manages to track her down, demanding money he forces his way into her flat and, fearing for her daughter, Yasuko does the unthinkable. In the aftermath she and her daughter are left staring down at the dead body of Shinji when suddenly someone knocks on the door. Her neighbour, Tetsuya, has guessed what has happened and ignoring Yasuko’s denials he proposes an audacious plan to cover up the murder. Little does she know that in his head he can calculate the most likely odds of how the detectives will investigate and the probable outcome.

Shunpei Kusanaqi is assigned to a new case, a mutilated dead body has been found by the river, the man’s clothes have been partially burnt and a bicycle abandoned nearby. Enough clues are found to allow them to find the man’s hotel room and figure out that they have discovered the body of Shinji Togashi. They soon learn that Shinji was looking for his wife and consequently check into her alibi, it turns out that on the evening when Shinji died Yasuko and Misato had been to the cinema and to karaoke, furthermore they state that they haven’t seen Shinji for a long time. The alibis seem rock solid, they are even backed up by solid evidence at the cinema and karaoke shop, but something bothers Shunpei and he soon winds up speaking to his friend Manabu Yukawa, a physics professor, about this latest case. The story is given a further twist when it turns out that Manabu and Tetsuya were at university together, driven by his own curiosity and a wish for a reunion they meet for the first time in years. However, Manabu is prompted by his own suspicions to investigate further the connection between Tetsuya and Yasuko.

Meanwhile, Yasuko meets up with an old friend who is now a widower, and with whom a romantic spark flares up. Ever watchful Tetsuya notices this and his actions become decidedly sinister. At this point the tempo of the story quickens as Shunpei’s and Manabu’s separate investigations exert pressure on Yasuko and Tetsuya. However, it starts to become unclear whether they are following the clues that they find or that they are purposely being fed them. The second half of the story is very thought provoking and the reader is forced to become engrossed in the story. The author has a persuasive voice making the audience feel they know what has happened and who is lying while through the actions of Shunpei and Manabu the reader slowly doubt they know how the crime was covered up, and more importantly know which crime was actually committed. Although the author could have focused a little more on the dilemma faced by women with abusive ex-partners, he still portrays Yasuko and her daughter compassionately while a clever twist in the story reveals that they aren’t lying about their alibi.