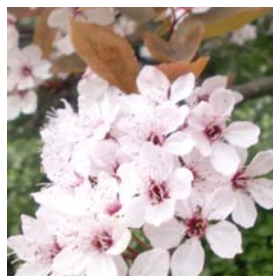




Editor: Sean Curtin

Managing Editor: John Toppon



As spring finally bursts forth and election fever grips the British media, we present another issue brimming with illuminating reviews on the latest Japan-related books and movies. Sir Hugh Cortazzi looks at a fascinating book on the Mongol invasion of Japan. Most readers are probably familiar with the so called sacred/divine wind or kamikaze which blew the invading Mongol fleet off course, saving Japan. Few will know the more detailed historical picture this informative and well-researched work provides.

Our next review examines the complex issues surrounding Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, the Shinto establishment often at the epicentre of recent Sino-Japanese tensions. The wide range of perspectives within this single volume provides some enlightening insights on this seemingly intractable issue. Ian Nish reviews a collection of history papers compiled in honour of Marius Berthus Jansen, one of the postwar pioneers of Japanese studies in the United States. Susan Meehan expertly dissects director Hirokazu Koreeda's latest movie, "Still Walking," which both powerfully and humorously explores the stresses and strains of Japanese family life.

Adam House offers his first review for this publication, looking at a book of beautifully crafted and emotive poems by Takako Arai. Mikihiro Maeda attempts to explain the elusive mechanics and philosophy behind Hiroyuki Itsuki's nostalgic "My Song Story in My Life" while William Farr gives us his down-to-earth take on the controversial "The Year of No Money in Tokyo."

## Sean Curtin

### New reviews

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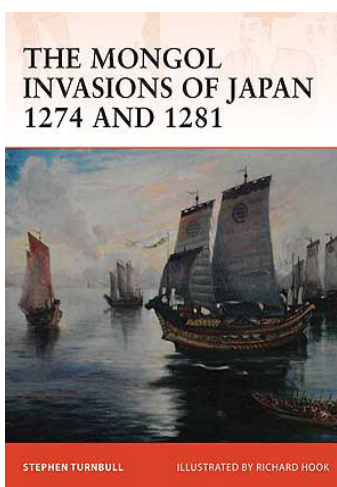
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### We are grateful to our regular reviewers:

|                   |                    |
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| Sir Hugh Cortazzi | Susan Meehan       |
| Simon Cotterill   | Takahiro Miyao     |
| William Farr      | Ian Nish           |
| Fumiko Halloran   | Ben-Ami Shillony   |
| Mikihiro Maeda    | Tomohiko Taniguchi |

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## The Mongol Invasions of Japan 1274 and 1281

by Stephen Turnbull, illustrated by Richard Hook

Osprey, 2010, 96 pages, copious illustration.  
Paperback, £14.99  
ISBN 978 1 84603 4565

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Stephen Turnbull has specialised in the study of the samurai and Japanese warriors. His latest book on the Mongol invasions of Japan provides a colourful introduction to these important episodes in Japanese medieval history. Turnbull has drawn not only on published studies by previous scholars but also on translations which he has made from the Hachiman Gudōkan, a work "believed to date from not long after the invasions as it was intended to be used as a lever to obtain rewards [for the samurai fighters against the invaders] from Kamakura" where the bakufu then had its headquarters with Hōjō Tokimune controlling the nominal shogun. This account is "complemented by the text and illustrations of the famous Mōko Shūrai Ekotoba (Mongol Invasions Scroll), the painted scrolls with accompanying narrative commissioned by an ambitious samurai called Takezaki Suenaga who sought reward for his services.



The samurai Suenaga facing Mongol arrows and bombs. Mōko Shūrai Ekotoba (蒙古襲来絵詞), circa 1293.

As Turnbull points out, the numbers involved in medieval battles “are notoriously prone to exaggeration.” He estimates that in the first invasion of 1274 the Mongol force may not have been much more than 3,600 strong and the Japanese defenders about 6,000. He notes that for the first time in Japanese history the invaders used gunpowder in “exploding bombs.” These bombs surprised and puzzled the Japanese warriors whose body armour of metal and leather was much lighter than that worn by medieval knights in Europe. Turnbull speculates that the first invasion which lasted only one day may only have been intended as a quick probing raid. The invaders nevertheless lost one in three of their force.

The second attempt seven years later was a much larger affair. “Six hundred warships” were ordered by the Mongols from South China. There were supposed to be “40,000 troops on the eastern route from Korea and 100,000 Southern Chinese.” But these numbers were certainly exaggerated. The Japanese were prepared and, anticipating an attack in Hakata bay, which lay at the end of the route from Korea via Tsushima and the island of Iki, had built around the shore of Hakata Bay a strong defensive wall. The wall, which still survives in part, prevented the invaders from gaining a foothold in the bay. Instead they took possession of two islands in the bay from which they planned to launch raids against Hakata, but the typhoon, which struck the area and became known as the divine wind or kamikaze, destroyed many of the Mongol ships and had a devastating effect on the morale of the attackers who were already weakened by disease. Inevitably the defeat of the Mongols created many myths not least about the divine wind which was used by Japanese nationalists to boost the idea of Japan as the land of the gods.

Turnbull draws attention to archaeological evidence discovered in recent years. In 1994, three large wood-and-stone anchors were found and in 2001 the remains of one of the Mongol ships were discovered.

Many questions remain unanswered. For instance did the Mongol leaders really think that they could conquer and keep the Japanese islands under their hegemony? Their

intelligence about Japan was inevitably limited but did they not realise that Hakata bay was so well defended? Why did they not attempt multiple attacks on a number of Japanese targets?

## Yasukuni the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past

JOHN BREEN  
editor

Yasukuni, the War  
Dead and the Struggle  
for Japan's Past

by John Breen

C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd,  
2007, 202 pages.  
Hardcover £25.00

Review by Sean Curtin



Long-standing disputes surrounding Japan's wartime conduct in China during the 1930s and 1940s

continue to plague present day diplomatic relations between the two neighbours, making bilateral political ties volatile and prone to bouts of instability. One of the key Sino-Japanese points of friction is the relatively obscure Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. In this impressive English language work John Breen brings together eight scholars who represent a diverse array of perspectives spanning the entire spectrum of thought on the Shinto shrine. The conflicting Chinese, Japanese and foreign opinions found in this volume, illuminate the radically differing standpoints and national narratives surrounding the shrine. They also demonstrate the daunting challenge the two countries face in their efforts to resolve this highly emotive and contentious issue.

In an excellent introductory chapter John Breen puts Yasukuni firmly in its historical and contemporary context. The shrine is dedicated to the Japan's war dead and is primarily controversial for two reasons. Firstly, twelve convicted Class A war criminals are enshrined within it, and secondly its attached museum, known as the Yushukan, presents a highly selective account of Japan's actions in China and during WWII. The establishment was unexpectedly catapulted into the international arena during the entire tenure of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001-2006) who visited it annually, each time creating waves of regional protest which effectively crippled Sino-Japanese political exchanges and seriously damaged links with South Korea. Since Koizumi left office in September 2006, bilateral political ties have markedly improved but the shadow of Yasukuni continues to pose a threat to long-term progress and stability. A future Koizumi-style flare up over the shrine could easily wipe out recent political advances which are constructed on a fragile basis.

Breen's opening chapter sets the scene for Caroline Rose's informative piece on the shrine's place in modern Sino-



Japanese relations. She analyzes why Yasukuni is such a curse on current political dynamics and looks at Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's 15 August 1985 pilgrimage, which ignited the first international protest and thrust the sleepy shrine to global prominence. Nakasone did not visit the shrine again and much later confessed in his memoirs that this was to avoid offending Beijing. Her analysis then focuses on the damage caused by Koizumi's six forays and the severe problems created in the diplomatic sphere.



PM Nakasone's 15 August 1985 visit first thrust Yasukuni to global prominence

Despite pleas from several of his predecessors, including Nakasone, to cease the contentious pilgrimages, Koizumi doggedly ignored all requests. Rose notes, "Nakasone suggested that Koizumi could have demonstrated greater courage by choosing not to visit the shrine (page 46)."

In the following chapter, "A Religious Perspective on the Yasukuni Shrine Controversy" Kevin Doak gives us a spiritual perspective on the controversy, and also reminds us why academics seldom make good politicians or diplomats.

With regard to Koizumi's controversial annual sojourn Doak declares, "I wish that he had abandoned his reserve and visited Yasukuni monthly or even weekly, instead of the annual visits of his premiership, to gain greater familiarity with the sacred nature of the sacrifices that are commemorated there (page 54)." Doak is also against the removal of war criminals arguing, "Can the Chinese leaders and those that argue that the Class A war criminals should be removed from Yasukuni really be so arrogant as to believe that they themselves are perfect human beings? (page 56)" Doak passionately believes that future prime ministers should frequently visit the shrine and strongly encouraged Koizumi's successor, Shinzo Abe, to do so. He must have been bitterly disappointed that Abe and his following two LDP successors never went near the shrine and that current Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has clearly stated his intension not to step foot in its grounds.

In the next chapter Wang Zhixin clearly explains why

Chinese people find it so utterly offensive when Japanese political leaders visit the controversial shrine. He manages to capture many of the mainstream arguments that circulate amongst ordinary Chinese people and are frequently found in the Chinese media. For example, he explains, "Thirteen of the fourteen Class A war criminals enshrined at Yasukuni, men who inflicted the gravest harm on the Chinese people in modern history, had hands soiled with Chinese blood...the Prime Minister is the leader of a nation and a public figure. His very act of visiting Yasukuni was calculated to reflect the feelings of the whole of Japan, and embodied the attitude of the Japanese government towards Japan's war of aggression and Class A war criminals (page 75)."

When a Japanese leader visits Yasukuni he believes, "Asian nations, and particularly China, cannot forgive such an outrage. (page 72)." He strongly condemns Koizumi's Yasukuni forays as, "reprehensible in emotional and rational terms, unforgivable in both Eastern morals and international ethics. (page 73)." Wang is offended by those who try to down play Japan's wartime record and deny its wartime guilt. In present day Japan, some, including elected politicians, openly question whether the Nanjing massacre occurred (see chapter six by Nitta Hitoshi), if



Yasukuni acts as a magnet for extreme rightwing groups

women were forced in to sexual slavery by the military, as well as the validity of the war crimes trials. Doak touches on this last aspect in the previous chapter, when he writes, "The legitimacy of the verdicts is highly questionable from a legal perspective, given that they were judged according to ex post facto law, it is only natural that some Japanese oppose the verdicts, even though they do not necessarily justify the war (page 57)." Yasukuni also acts as a gathering point for extreme rightwing groups which deny the country's wartime guilt.

Looking at the issue again from a religious perspective, Seki Hei's view is radically different from his fellow countryman in the preceding chapter. However, he agrees that "It is no exaggeration to say that for five years after Koizumi took office as Prime Minister, Sino-Japanese relations revolved entirely around the issue of his visits to the Yasukuni shrine (page 91)." Seki Hei

visualizes the dispute in an entirely different light from his compatriot, observing, "China's abnormal obsession with the issue of prime ministerial Yasukuni visits resulted in its government being forced into a cul-de-sac in terms of its diplomacy with Japan (page 93)." He arrives at his conclusions by interpreting the dispute from a deeply religious perspective. He believes Chinese leaders inability to "recognize the existence of the spirits of the deceased" inhibits them from fully comprehending what he sees as the religious dimensions of the issue. He writes, "the leaders of the CCP cannot accommodate the notion that 'after people die, they become spirits of a different nature to living people,' they cling to the belief that Tojo Hideki and the others venerated at Yasukuni are today the same Class A war criminals and the leaders of the war of aggression against China as they were before their deaths (page 99)." Seki Hei states that at the heart of the problem is a cultural gap in which the atheist Chinese communists are unable to understand the Japanese Shinto need to console the spirits of the dead through ritual performances at Yasukuni. Like Doak, Seki Hei sees the crux of the issue as a fundamental religious matter in which China has no right to interfere in. He concludes, "there will never be a solution to the antagonism and controversy between China and Japan surrounding the issue of Yasukuni visits; for it is a clash of civilizations (page 104)."

Neither Doak or Seki Hei explain why a political leader of a constitutionally secular state like Japan should indulge in controversial religious pilgrimages to a shrine of such profound symbolic significance. Constitutionally the prime minister is a political figure, not a religious leader, and both Daok and Seki Hei fail to properly address this issue in their analysis.

If one adapts Doak and Seki Hei's logic for comparative purposes, it would seem to highlight this religious element as an important factor in explaining why Germany has been able to construct good political ties with its former foes. Imagine the storm of protest if a Berlin shrine deified Adolf Hitler and a German leader were to visit it, the country would become a Pariah.

Tetsuya Takahashi's informative fifth chapter takes us away from the esoteric worlds of Seki Hei and Doak, examining Yasukuni as a legacy of colonialism and empire. He provides an excellent historical overview to support his case, observing, "Yasukuni shrine forms an inseparable unity with the imperialism and colonialism of the modern Japanese state. Given that Yasukuni is inseparable from Japan's modern colonialism, and given that these war dead continue to be honoured publicly in the same way as the executed Class A war criminals, the extent of the denial of Japan's responsibility for its colonial rule becomes fairly obvious (page 114)." He also sees the shrine as functioning as a means to sanitize and glorify war by ignoring its brutal reality, the suffering of all individuals involved and the conflict's horrific consequences. He makes a very powerful argument by analyzing the various ways those remembered at Yasukuni died, pointing out that about sixty percent died either directly or indirectly from starvation rather than in

action on the battle field. He warns, "Yasukuni ideology has sought to cancel out the violent nature of death in war by re-imagining it as 'glorious death' (page 119)."

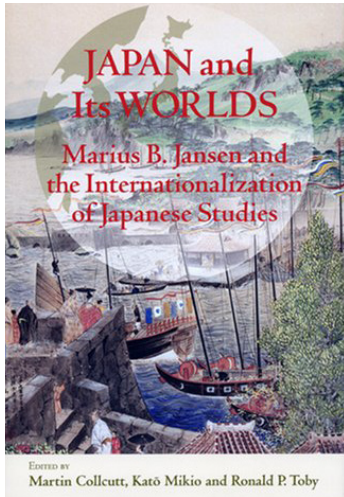
In the following chapter, Hitoshi Nitta takes an almost diametrically opposing view to Takahashi, arguing that Japanese prime ministers, and indeed the general public, should as a matter of patriotic duty worship at Yasukuni. He writes, "I believe that it is a citizen's important duty and right to pay respects, and other thanks, to those who sacrificed their lives for the nation (page 126)." Nitta believes Beijing exaggerates the extent of Chinese suffering during war in order to gain political advantage. For example despite the government's 1993 acknowledgement and the massive amount of eye-witness testimony, he does not believe there is any "objective proof" (page 137) indicating the mass sexual enslavement and forced prostitution of women during WWII by the Japanese army. Nitta bemoans the 1993 official government apology for these horrendous sexual war crimes and considers the entire issue a "fabrication." In a similar vein he also dismisses the Nanjing Massacre and the forced group suicides in Okinawa, stating, "these stories were fabricated (page 141)." He also denounces the following chapter by John Breen for questioning the Yushukan's version of history which he sees as more accurate.

Breen examines the role of Yasukuni in what he calls a loss of historical memory. He echoes Wang's early argument, seeing prime ministerial patronage as highly problematic because a visit by a prominent political leader accords the shrine with the status of a national shrine and thus its representation of history is likewise accorded an official status. By analyzing how the shrine presents itself and history, Breen is able to highlight the serious problems created by this approach which airbrushes out the suffering of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people during the war. Breen observes, "Neatly obliterated from the historical memory of the Yushukan are the historical facts of Japanese war crimes, of Japanese colonialism and aggression, and of Japanese defeat (page 155)."

Philip Seaton rounds off the volume with a fact filled look at the media's treatment of Koizumi's Yasukuni sojourns. Seaton see the saga as having the right elements for a good emotive media story. He methodically charts the national and regional press's reporting as well as TV coverage. He concludes that "it is difficult to see how ongoing prime ministerial and particularly imperial Yasukuni worship could ever be part of any reconciliation process (page 188)."

How the relationship between East Asia's two economic giants develops in the 21st Century will have a significant impact not only regionally, but also globally. This fact makes this impressive work, which encompasses the cardinal points of the Yasukuni issue, extremely valuable and allows the reader to understand difficult to grasp viewpoints. Breen must be congratulated for assembling such an enlightening collection of views on what still remains one of the most contentious issues in Sino-Japanese relations.





## Japan and its worlds: Marius Jansen and the Internationalization of Japanese Studies

Edited by Martin  
Collcutt, Kato Mikio and  
Ronald P. Toby

I House Press, Tokyo, 2007,  
299 pages . Hardcover,  
£22.00  
ISBN 978-4-903452-08-1

Review by Ian Nish

This is a volume of papers in honour of Marius Berthus Jansen, one of the great post-war pioneers of Japanese studies in the US, who died in 2001. Born in Holland, he emigrated to the US, served for three years during the Asia-Pacific war and then took up East Asian studies at Harvard. From 1959 he took up the chair of Japanese history at Princeton where he had been an undergraduate and taught there till his retirement. His colleagues and friends held a conference after his death and this book is a compilation of the papers presented there in his honour.

The book also contains one of Jansen's last public papers entitled "Japan and its World" which was delivered as a keynote presentation at a conference in Kyoto in October 1994. I was fortunate enough to be present at the meeting. The other keynote speaker was Oe Kensaburo who had on that very day been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Jansen's title was, therefore, doubly symbolic. It was a session straddling a western writer analysing Japan with a Japanese writer reflecting on his life in the wider world.

Jansen's theme was to speculate about sakoku, [鎖国] that self-inflicted seclusion whereby Japan was for more than two centuries sealed from the outside world apart from the Dutch presence. Jansen challenges this conception, arguing that, while the Tokugawa rulers varied in their attitudes, Japan was in these centuries a regional player, having trade and cultural contacts with Korea, the Ryukyus and China and was a relatively open society until the early 19th century when the Tokugawa shogunate felt threats to their rule and clamped down on overseas contacts. So sakoku applied not to the Asian region but to Japan's relations with the wider world. While the Japanese were in Jansen's view quite outgoing with their neighbours, they were secretive and wanted to prevent foreigners acquiring too much knowledge of their country. That secretiveness persisted and meant that there have been even in the present day difficulties in bringing works of Japanese scholarship to the rest of the world.

Happily this book is one of the early volumes published by the new I House Press, the commercial imprint of

the International House of Japan, Tokyo. I congratulate International House for taking on the task of publishing a series of English-language translations of seminal writings by Japanese scholars, which the western world badly needs. Marius Jansen spent a year (1960-1) on the staff of International House charting a course for the institution in its early days. He would have been delighted by this new publishing endeavour which will bring the fruits of Japanese research and thinking to a wider readership.

This volume contains essays of the highest quality which advance our knowledge considerably in the central areas of modern Japanese history which were of interest to Jansen. They are a fitting tribute to a great teacher who was always reaching out to general readers in the US and Japan and trying to increase understanding between them. The world is the gainer from them.

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## Still Walking [歩いてても歩いても]

directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda [是枝裕和]

2008, 114 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

Kore-eda's latest film is a sympathetic, humorous and warm portrayal of a Japanese family laid bare revealing strains and tensions universal to all social groupings. The spectator is almost lulled into forgiving or excusing his/her own familial shortcomings, finding solace in the fact that they are repeated eternally.

The two Yokoyama siblings and families gather at the parental home, a wonderfully large and open space, for what we gather is the fifteenth anniversary of older brother Junpei's tragic drowning. Chinami, the sister, is already there with her husband and two children when brother Ryota reluctantly arrives with his wife, recently widowed, and his stepson, Atsushi. Ryota is uncomfortable in his parents' home, feeling they don't condone his marriage and that he has let down his taciturn father by not following in his footsteps to become a doctor.



The patriarch, pretending to be busy in his own study for much of the film, is disdainful of Ryota's career choice,

forever comparing him with Junpei. When Ryota catches him recommending a medical career to Atsushi, he puts his foot down and tells him not to interfere. Atsushi is, in fact, keen on becoming a piano tuner; we later find out this was his own father's occupation. Paralleling this, it is also revealed as the gathered women begin looking through Ryota's childhood books and pictures that he once wanted to become a doctor, emulating his own father's career choice.

Was it disillusionment with his father that led to Ryota's change of career plan – the kind of disillusionment Atsushi won't encounter having lost his own father at a young age, the ideal of his father forever left unshattered?

The sadness and twistedness in the characters is palpable, and the audience is given a taste of the deceptions we play on one another and ourselves. Chinami is keen to move in to her parents' house with her family in an attempt to give her mother company and support while her mother, in an aside to Ryota, pragmatically says she



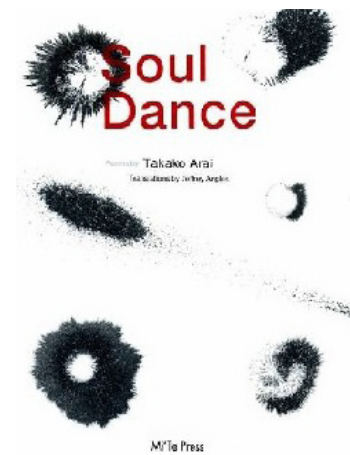
would rather not have that noisy lot move in and disturb her peace.

On the other hand is Ryota, a picture restorer whose professional life is in limbo; he pretends to receive work-related calls and has involved his wife and Atsushi in this deceit. Atsushi, who tends to call Ryota by his first name is told by his mother to call him 'father' in front of her in-laws; unwillingly, he complies in this pretence.

As the film progresses we are able to witness, through a bittersweet moment when the grandmother plays the 1960s tune 'Blue Light, Yokohama' on the record player, the unspoken hurt that she has been harbouring for decades. The viewer comes to understand that the snide remarks she makes to her new daughter-in-law are an expression of this pent-up pain; so is her act of inviting the (unfortunate) boy whom Junpei died while saving, to visit their home every year. This is not done for altruistic reasons, it transpires, but for the pleasure of taunting him and making him remember the death of her child. The shock of the audience at this disclosure reverberated round the cinema.

Despite the intricate emotions this sprawling family lays bare, they seem fond of each other and imbued with

genuine concern and love for one another. We are all hard done by at times and the best way to deal with setbacks, it would seem, is to keep positive without wasting time becoming twisted; it will only end in regret.



**Soul Dance:  
Selected Poems**  
by Takako Arai,  
Translated by Jeffrey  
Angles, with Sawako  
Nakayasu and You  
Nakai

MiTe Press, 2008, 64 pages.  
Hardcover, £9.50  
ISBN: 978-4-9904416-0-9

Review by Adam House

Born in Kiryu City, Gunma Prefecture, Takako Arai grew up in a family closely connected to the local textile industry, a traditional craft in danger of facing extinction. The city's skyline is famed for its sawtooth-roofed mills. In the Nara period, the city's textiles were presented to the Imperial family, along with those from Kyoto. A phrase from the Edo period "For the West, it is Nishijin, for the East, it is Kiryu" is an indication of the prominence that textiles from Kiryu were held. Many of the poems included in "Soul Dance" are situated within this industry. Takako Arai's first collection of poems *Haobekki* was published in 1997 and *Tamashii Dance*, (*Soul Dance*), her second collection published in 2007 won the 41st Oguma Hideo Prize, published in English translation in 2008 by MiTe Press, a poetry journal where Arai is editor.

In her introduction Arai laments the effects that the recent economical downturns have had on the textile factories of her hometown, standing amongst the vacant lots where the factories once stood, these lots now sadly sold off at auction prices. Arai has chosen poetry and language as a means of showing resistance to these closures that are turning her hometown into a desolate place. In New York and Belgrade Arai saw vacant lots similar to the ones that the factories had occupied in her hometown, shadowless places that had been created by violence. She saw in them a profound message of what the present means to us. *Soul Dance* is a collection in two parts that infuses the physical and the spiritual, through them we are given a glimpse of life lived in proximity to a living industry. The poems are full of movement both in word and concept, in "For Amenouzume-san," which appears in both Japanese and English, a natural rhythm builds within the poem, *Ame-no-uzume*, the mythical Goddess who coaxed out the Sun Goddess *Amaterasu*, who had hidden in a cave, plunging the world into darkness, by using song and dance. "Mohei's Fire" a prose poem starting in a Tokyo suburb under redevelopment, and a meeting with the elderly *Takejiro-san* who recalls when the area was a



farming village, harvested vegetables were washed in the Yata river. Whilst recalling these slower days, Takejiro-san remembers Grandpa Mohei's encounter with a fox, in a poem that is like a fable from folklore brought up to date, when a candle seen in the present merges with one mentioned in the reminiscence. In the last poem "Shadow," amongst the rubble of a flattened factory, an object found left there before the bulldozers moved in, initiates a salvage into memory and attachment, a poem that at its root also turns to an inquiry on value.

Soul Dance is translated by Jeffrey Angles, assistant professor of Japanese literature and director of the Japanese program at Western Michigan University, whose award winning translation of "Forest of Eyes" is forthcoming from California University Press. Additional translators are Sawako Nakayasu, whose book "Texture Notes" is forthcoming from Letter Machine, and You Nakai, a member of no collective.



**My Song Story in My Life - The Youth of the Showa Era [わが人生の歌がたり 昭和の青春]**

**by Hiroyuki Itsuki [五木寛之]**

**Kadokawa Shoten, 2008, 206 pages. Paperback, £11 ISBN: 978-4-04-883994-5**

**Review by Mikihiko Maeda**

This is the second book of Hiroyuki Itsuki's "My Song Story in My Life" series. The first one was about the "joys and sorrows" of the Showa era with the focus on the sorrowful side of his own life (see the review in Issue 14 – Volume 3 Number 2 pages 4/5). This one, the second is about "youth" in the Showa era and covers the initial period of rapid postwar economic growth following the period of chaos and poverty in the immediate postwar period. The author, after dropping out of Waseda university, somehow managed to find a job, but his life did not go smoothly with little hope for his own future.

Japan went through the period of repatriation, demobilization and black markets, and then, due to the government's income doubling program in Showa 35 (1960), it was moving toward becoming a consumer society. For example, the Tokaido Shinkansen (Bullet Train) was opened, and the Tokyo Summer Olympics were held in Showa 39 (1964). The spirit of the Japanese went high and their eyes were beginning to shine. Many fascinating popular songs were born and, with alluring lyrics, which captured the people's hearts and minds in this bright era. In this volume the lyrics of fifty popular

songs are selected and commented on by the author, each with his special memory full of pathos.

In his school days, the author picked up many part-time jobs to make ends meet, for example, delivering newspapers, selling his blood, etc. After he unwillingly dropped out of university due to his failure/inability to pay tuition fees, he became a copywriter, worked for an ad agency, and helped produce radio or TV programs. Then, he began receiving requests to write essays and columns from his own clients. In spite of these developments, however, his own feelings were something like working "at the bottom of the mass media" to borrow his own words (page 81). After that, he started to write commercial songs and became a songwriter under contract with a record company. His pen names were "Nobu Takashi" and "Tachihara Misaki." And his lyrics around that time were somewhat influenced by such American singers as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, who were at the forefront of the protest movement, expressing emotions which captured the era. Among those lyrics, he wrote one poem using his real name in the late 60s, depicting one boy who was abandoned in a war-torn village alone. It is entitled "A Village without a Dove" sung by Hiroko Fujino in 1969, it was awarded a special prize the following year (page 170). His feelings in those days were reflected in the loneliness and sadness of the lyrics written in his real name.

He makes an interesting analysis on page 160 of the book, saying that Japanese popular songs in the 60s might be categorized into three groups. The first is "Enka", native Japanese folk songs. Another is western-style popular songs. The third group is "Utageo" songs. There were many Utageo tearooms in Tokyo around that time. The Olympic year 1964 was a turning point for the postwar history of Japan's economy. At the same time, many people sang the same songs together in "Utageo" rooms, sharing the same feelings or same messages toward their own lives as well as their communities. Itsuki wrote a novel entitled "Enka," a story about an ambitious record producer in the era and it was made into a movie in 1968.

Then, he became intensely busy, although he found time to marry a lady (Reiko) who was once his university classmate and was working as a psychiatrist at the time of their wedding. On this occasion, he sorted out his jobs and then travelled to the Soviet Union and Scandinavia, leaving the city of Yokohama for Nakhodka by way of the vessel Baikal, a passenger boat. It seemed that one of the reasons why he wanted to go to the Soviet Union was because the author majored in the Russian literature at the university.

Probably a more important reason for his travels might be that he could not feel at home but was alienated from realities of life in Tokyo at that time. So, he wanted to escape to the Soviet Union which was not very popular as a tourist destination in those days. For the same reason,

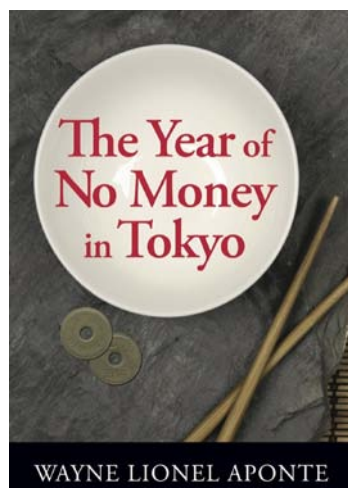
after returning to Japan, he retreated to a remote town, Kanazawa, which was the hometown of his wife.

In the meantime, he wrote a novel "Say Goodbye to Hoodlums in Moscow" (Saraba Mosukuwa Gurentai), based on the experience of his travels, and was awarded the Shosetsu Gendai Shinjin Award in 1966. In the following year, he won the prestigious Naoki prize for "See the Pale Horse" (Aozameta Uma-o Miyo).

Surprisingly, even after he received these reputable prizes, his inner feelings still remained the same as before. He did not want to be disturbed by the frantic cries of the mass media, but to continue his quiet life in Kanazawa away from Tokyo (page 205). The economy appeared to be booming and many popular songs at the time reflected this phenomenon, but his feelings were quite apart from the general mood of the public. He describes himself as a "deracine" (page 81) who lost his home town, a rootless wanderer like duckweed. On the final page of this book, he concludes by saying that he would have to lead an extremely busy, "thunderous and stormy" life after receiving the Naoki Prize. The reader will have to wait to see how his life and environment will change and how the popular songs he chooses in this volume will reflect his feelings accordingly in the next, and presumably final volume of this series.

This book comes with a CD featuring two songs, "Song for the Circus" and "Sweet Blues," along with the author's narration which can remind the listener of the author's own program on the NHK midnight radio, broadcast once a month some years ago. Most listeners will probably be soothed by the "low-key" talk as well as the nice songs. The introductory part of the CD is exactly the same as that of the author's radio program.

*This review was produced in collaboration with the Global Communications Platform and a different and shorter version of this article has also been published on the Platform: <http://www.glocom.org>*



## The Year of No Money in Tokyo

by Wayne Lionel Aponte

Watkins & McKay, 2009, 168 pages. Hardcover, £13.79  
ISBN 0982055005

Review by William Farr

Japanese commentaries and travelogues from a generation of Westerners who have lived and (most likely) taught in Japan are often floral affairs. There is some difficulty faced – such as in Robert Twigger's "Angry White Pyjamas" (see issue 19) – or a journey is undertaken

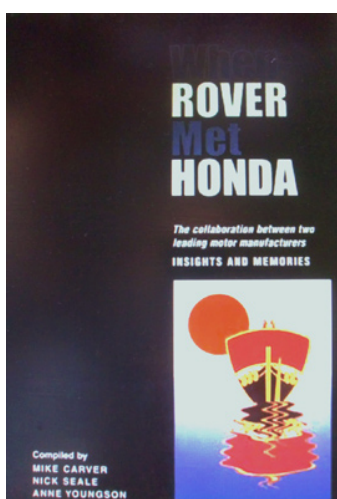
like in Will Ferguson's "Hokkaido Highway Blues," or Alan Booth's monumentally brilliant "Roads to Sata." But Mr Aponte's new book, "The Year of No Money in Tokyo" has the feel of a Ryu Murakami novel (e.g. In the Miso Soup). It is unapologetic, the narrative is driven and there is no real end point in sight. There are times when the actual story would not be believable in a piece of fiction as it is simply too fantastical. The story of an African-American man trying to make a living for himself in Tokyo when he falls down on his luck is not one often told. In political terms this would be 'Realpolitik', and the significance of this book is that it does not have any rose tinted glasses on. His exploits include being forced to share a one room flat with a girl who splits the room with a large clothes rail and then engages in what can only be described as strange nocturnal habits in a shared room. Even though the author at the end of the book has gone through the crucible and emerged stronger, more willing to engage in difficult times, he is indelibly scarred. Not scarred in the same way as in Shizuka Tendo's "Yakuza Moon" (see issue 24) that traces the real life story of a girl brought up in a Yakuza family. Rather in this book, Mr Aponte experiences the harshness of unemployment coupled with this occurring in a foreign country. Japan in terms of unemployment is an unforgiving country, group think is the norm but drop off the map through lack of employment and the system very quickly will not let you back in if you have no current experience. The award winning documentary "A Story of Love and Hate" traces some of this. The book in essence encapsulates a feeling of uneasiness about Japanese society that runs deeper than Mr Aponte suggests. Koizumi's attempts to reform public sector services such as the post office, and the recent swing in the Lower House elections all reflect this 'something is rotten within' undercurrent that appears to be burdening modern Japan.

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**Next Issue:**

**When Honda Met Rover**

edited by Mike Carver, Nicholas Seale and Anne Youngson



In the next issue of the Japan Society Review we will be looking at *When Rover Met Honda*, which charts the successful 15-year partnership between two car industry giants. The book explores the gripping saga of how Eastern and Western car manufacturing methods were able to harmoniously blend to create a winning formula. It also details how this fruitful venture was prematurely terminated.