

Editor: Sean Curtin

Managing Editor: Clare Barclay

Along with our usual great selection of new book reviews in this issue we offer our first proper film review of the award-winning and highly popular movie *Hula Girls*. We now hope to start regular reviews of major Japanese films and DVD releases to complement our book line-up. You will also find a preview of the thought-provoking debut novel *Under the Sun* along with our main features and Japanese language book reviews. Finally, please keep on sending in your letters and comments about what you would like to see in *Japan Book Review*. Also please remember if there is a book or movie you would particularly like to make a comment about, then either e-mail us (info@japansociety.org.uk) your thoughts or post them to us. We will put your comments up on the Reader's Comments section of the website and when possible publish some of them.

Sean Curtin

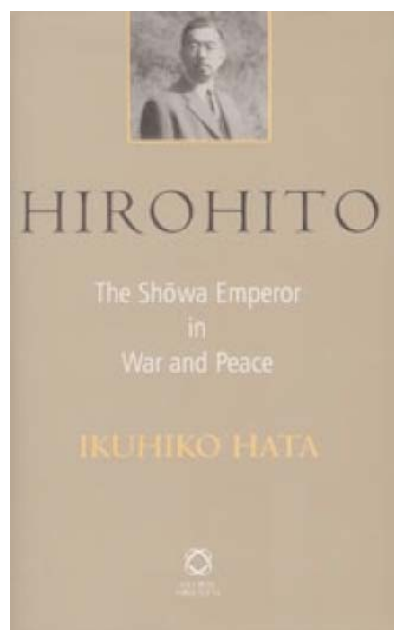
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Japan Book Review



Hirohito: The Showa Emperor in War and Peace,

Ikuhiko Hata, edited by Marius B.Jansen,

ISBN 978-1-905246-35-9, pages 272 including notes and index, Global Oriental, 2007.

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

So much has been written about the Showa Emperor that some readers may ask whether there is anything more to be said about a man who would hardly have left much lasting impression if he had been born in any other walk of life. But Professor Ikuhiko Hata's book provides some interesting insights into the emperor's personality, as well as into aspects of modern Japanese history.

Professor Ikuhiko Hata, professor emeritus of Nihon University, has delved deeply into the source material available in Japanese and English and has interviewed many of the participants in the events he describes. The results of his researches impressed the late Professor Marius Jansen, a doyen of Japanese historical studies in the USA, and we must be grateful to him and the publishers, Global Oriental, for bringing these fascinating studies to the attention of English speaking students of modern Japanese history.

This is not a new biography of the Showa Emperor but a series of historical studies of events in which he was closely involved. The first essay deals with the

infamous ni-ni-roku (26 February 1936) incident when the emperor's adamant refusal, following the murder of some of his closest advisers, to countenance a "Showa Restoration" as demanded by the rebels, ensured that the mutiny was crushed. But as Professor Hata puts it: "From the emperor's perspective, the mountain had laboured and produced a mouse. Hegemony had merely passed from the hands of the Imperial Way Faction into the hands of the Control Faction and its epigones and Japan would soon plunge headlong down the path to destruction in the China and Pacific Wars." Hata's account fills in many details and gives a vivid picture of how the events must have seemed to those at the centre of the crisis.

The second chapter goes over the events in the final days of the Pacific War and describes how the emperor was eventually induced to take the decision which led to Japan's surrender. It also depicts the reactions of the military and naval extremists and the traitorous attempts to stop the emperor's broadcast. Inevitably it leaves many questions unanswered. Why in particular did it take so long for intelligent men (and many of Japan's leaders were intelligent and realistic) to recognize that Japan was defeated. This should have been obvious at the latest by the end of 1944. Yet they adhered to the belief that Japan's "polity" (a concept which non-Japanese find hard to fathom) could only be preserved by fighting a last battle on the mainland which could only lead to total destruction. Their failure makes them guilty of the millions of deaths caused by the continuing war in the months from January to August 1945. The emperor seems to have recognized that Japan faced total defeat, but his personality was not strong enough to enable him to challenge the guilty men. We also have to ask how much he knew about the atrocities carried out overseas and if he did realize the facts why he apparently did not attempt to stop further acts of barbarity.

The third chapter reveals the extent to which in the final days of the war and the early days of the occupation attempts were made by Japanese extremists to ensure the survival of the imperial line. Many of the facts revealed here were new to me. They confirm that the occupation authorities were right to be wary of the former militarists.

The final chapters deal with the emperor's relations with General MacArthur and the possibility of the emperor abdicating, a step which the General regarded as unnecessary and undesirable. MacArthur and his advisers clearly saw the retention of the emperor as essential to the maintenance of internal peace in Japan.

Hata also deals with the emperor's position in relating to the International Military Tribunal's trial of class A war criminals. This section is relevant to recent revelations about the emperor's criticism of the decision by the Yasukuni shrine authorities to enshrine the souls of these criminals.



1000 Years of the Tale of Genji

Yoshioka Sachio (Master textile dyer and historian) at the "Recreating Genji's Palette" symposium held at the Embassy of Japan, London on 7th November 2007 to mark 1000 years of the Tale of Genji.



"Koizumi no Shori, Media no Haiboku" (Victory for Koizumi, Defeat for the Media),

by Takashi Uesugi,

Soshisha, November 2006, 286 pages, 1500 yen

Review by Fumiko Halloran

This is a rare book written by a journalist who criticizes the faults not only of himself but the press in general in its reporting on the Koizumi government. He is courageous in listing his original articles and examining them against what actually happened, adding background around specific topics he covered. He found that most of his reporting on Prime Minister Koizumi either was not accurate or grossly misinterpreted the reality of PM Koizumi's domestic and foreign policy.

Perhaps the most serious weakness in Mr. Uesugi's reporting was that he did not cover domestic policy in detail, particularly of the structural reforms on which PM Koizumi risked his political life. Mr. Uesugi admits that he did not extensively report on that because he did not fully understand the details of economic and financial policies at the time. Instead, he focused on the political struggles that surrounded the structural reforms. Being a freelance reporter, perhaps he could not cover all the topics but, as he admits, he and many journalists were swept up in covering PM Koizumi's fights with his own party, his unexpected choices of key cabinet ministers, and political drama such as firing of Ms. Makiko Tanaka as foreign minister. The Koizumi regime was never dull but presented dramatic characters and stories and was therefore nicknamed "The Koizumi Theatre."

Foreign press reported extensively on PM Koizumi's foreign policy but stories on his domestic reforms and economic, fiscal, and financial problems drew only scant attention, except for publications such as the Economist magazine. (I thank the NBR staff for doing research on this point).

Mr. Uesugi's portrait of PM Koizumi when he was in office is rather harsh, calling him an ultimate narcissist who focused only on his own ideas, ruthlessly cut even close political allies if necessary, and pursued his goals relentlessly. The author, perhaps correctly, points out that PM Koizumi's declaration of a general election when the Upper House defeated his bill for privatizing the postal savings and insurance system damaged the basic rules of the parliamentary system. Indeed, there was a question why the prime minister could declare a general election when the Lower House had passed the legislation. But it was within his jurisdiction. The only problem the press had was that most political reporters did not believe PM Koizumi would pull such a stunt as they were mired in the traditional political games. When PM Koizumi declared an election, the press was thrown into confusion and was forced to follow the political frenzy rather than remain in control of the reporting. PM Koizumi's LDP had a landslide victory. Mr. Uesugi saw the election in the summer of 2005 as an epitaph of defeat for the press.

Mr. Uesugi concludes that journalists, particularly political editors and reporters, did not understand that PM Koizumi and his team had succeeded in breaking down the traditional relationship between the government and the press. Traditionally, the Chief Cabinet Secretary made government announcements at press conferences. Political reporters from major news organizations who belonged to the Cabinet press club were fed materials and briefed by ministries. The reporters competed with each other on personal and direct access to the party leaders, trying to get latest information about what was going on within the party and the cabinet. By this method, they speculated about forthcoming cabinet and party appointments. The shortcoming of this practice was that political reporters were often too close to those in power and were accustomed to being briefed by the ruling party and ministries rather than investigating the issues on their own.

The first action the Koizumi team took on the press relations, however, was to change the system of reporting. Traditionally, print press reporters monopolized the questioning of the prime minister who would come back from the parliament or various functions to his official residence. This was called "burasagari shuzai" (hanging on to the source) as the PM would answer questions while walking into the residence. TV crews were not allowed. The Koizumi team changed it to limit the burasagari arrangement for the print press reporters during the day only and focused on TV reporting in the evening. Consequently, PM Koizumi's remarks and image were beamed directly into millions of households. This in turn generated greater interest in the so-called "TV wide shows" during which contemporary political topics were debated. The effort to bypass the close relationship among bureaucrats, politicians, and political reporters worked and reporters from the Cabinet press club began to lose useful sources. An exciting topic was cabinet appointments but, since PM Koizumi never consulted anyone, even his staff, on these appointments, the reporters were left in the dark until the moment of the announcement. So were the LDP leaders.

Mr. Uesugi suggests that Japanese newspapers should identify their writers, should investigate taboo subjects more vigorously, and stop self-censorship through the press club system. He is particularly critical of TV coverage, although he himself became a news reporter for a television station last year. Directly involved in TV programming, he asserts he realizes now how TV coverage of the Koizumi government was often distorted because they were sensitive to the reaction of viewers. For example, when Ms. Makiko Tanaka was popular among the public, no TV stations dared to report on her incompetence in running the ministry and her bizarre behavior and remarks that almost paralyzed Japan's foreign policy. When PM Koizumi finally fired her, his approval rate dropped overnight by 20 points.

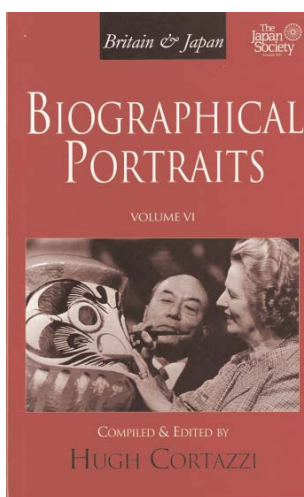
Mr. Uesugi was born in 1968. After graduating from college, he worked for a TV station, then became an aide to a member of the House of Representatives. After that, he was hired as a reporter in The New York Times Tokyo bureau and later began to work as a freelance reporter. Since 2006, he has been a reporter for Asahi Television.

This book is worth reading because of the author's honesty in examining the flaws of Japanese press. His central interest is to pursue a healthy tension between the government and the media. As a freelance reporter during the Koizumi years, he certainly seemed to have pursued that objective, however

flawed. As a member of a television station that can be saddled with viewer ratings, sponsors, government regulations, and tension between management and union, this reviewer wonders how far Mr. Uesugi can go toward that goal. Mr. Uesugi's candid book seemed to attract attention of Japanese readers, as the book went into a fourth printing in one month after its publication and remains a best seller.

A different version of this review first appeared on the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) Japan-U.S. Discussion Forum and is reproduced with permission of the author. The original review can be found here:

<http://www.nbr.org/forai/message.aspx?LID=5&MID=27545>



Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, volume VI

by Sir Hugh Cortazzi
(compiled and edited)

Japan Society and Global Oriental (Folkestone, Kent), 2007), xxiv + 424 pages, ISBN 978-1-905246-33-5

Review by Janet Hunter

Since the publication of the first volume in 1994, the chapters in the volumes of the Biographical Portraits series have provided us with an increasingly complex and multifaceted picture of the human interaction at the heart of Anglo-Japanese relations, at all levels of society and in different spheres of activity. This volume, like its predecessors, offers a highly eclectic mixture of personal experiences and life stories, focussing on individuals who, through their ideas and actions, or through the organisations with which they were associated, have contributed to the mutual interaction of the two countries over the past century and more.

This new volume consists of over thirty new case studies, as well as a short account of the visit by the Beatles to Japan in 1966. The portraits range widely, and include politicians, members of the imperial and royal families of the two countries, business leaders, literary and artistic figures, as well as scholars and teachers. The politicians include those such as Winston Churchill and Edward Heath, whose names are not normally associated with the history of Anglo-Japanese relations, but whose attitudes towards Japan were of signal importance at particular times during the 20th century. On the Japanese side, Yoshida Shigeru visited Britain in 1954, while Nitobe Inazo, famous as an interpreter of Japan for Western audiences, spent time in London working for the nascent League of Nations in 1919-20. We learn that court diplomacy was a key factor in communicating goodwill between the two countries, even in the turbulent interwar period, while the first foreign visit by a reigning Japanese monarch, that of the Showa Emperor to Britain in 1971, marked a stage in the rebuilding of friendship after the hostility of the Pacific War and Occupation years. Moreover, probably few readers know that princes Albert Victor and George in 1881 opted to be tattooed by Japanese tattooists with dragons on their arms, and they were not alone among visiting members of the

English royal family in doing so.

A major part of this volume is devoted to studies of business interaction, and Toyota and Nissan receive particular attention, as do the individuals on both sides involved in the Nissan and Toyota decisions to invest in production plants in Britain in the 1980s-1990s. Other Japanese and British businessmen have their own chapters. In some cases these are individuals whose recent roles in Anglo-Japanese relations are well known, such as Sir Peter Parker, Lord (Eric) Roll and Chino Yoshitoki of Daiwa Securities. Others are business leaders such as Morita Akio, whose careers were not particularly 'Britain-specific', but whose achievements have had a profound effect on life in the UK. Lesser known individuals involved with commerce and business earlier in the century include Frank Guyver Britton, who spent much of his life in Japan as an engineer, and Ernest Comfort, who was sent to Japan in the early 1920s to help develop aircraft production by Mitsubishi.

We also read about British writers who spent shorter or longer periods in Japan - Somerset Maugham, Ian Fleming, Frank Tuohy and Angela Carter - and whose experiences often shaped their subsequent writing. Several of the chapters focus on those who helped to increase the awareness and understanding of Japanese art and culture in Britain. In the context of the arts and crafts movement, Charles Holme sought to introduce the applied arts of Japan, under the slogan of 'beauty and utility.' The splendid collection of Japanese artefacts in the British Museum was largely the work of Augustus Franks, while James, Lord Bowes, established the first museum in Britain devoted to things Japanese, a collection sadly dispersed in the late 19th century. William Gowland, whose collection also found its way to the British Museum, made a signal contribution to the development of archaeology in Japan. Finally, there are studies of teachers and scholars, including the consul and later academic, J.H. Longford, and Kathleen Drew Baker, a botanist who never visited Japan, but whose research enabled the prosperity of the country's postwar nori production.

Writing a comprehensive appraisal of the content of this volume is impossible. The diversity of subject matter, writing style and approach is immense. Some are strongly academic in formulation, some much less so. Each reader will seek out the chapters that best accord with his or her particular interests. It would be invidious to select particular contributions as better or worse than others. I hope I may use the reviewer's prerogative, however, to note some personal preferences. I enjoyed particularly those chapters that told me about individuals such as Frank Guyver Britton about whom I knew little (though perhaps should have known more), but who devoted much of their lives to Japan and made a quiet contribution to the fabric of Anglo-Japanese relations. The cases made for the contribution of some of these lesser known individuals, such as Frank Gowland, was persuasive. Other chapters shed a new light on some familiar names, such as the journalist Hugh Byas, or the scholar Maruyama Masao. A final strength of the book is the inclusion of a number of personal memoirs, which are likely to constitute an important reference for the historians of the future. Overall, though, there is in this volume something for everyone, whatever the nature of their interest in the history of the relationship between Japan and Britain.

Janet Hunter is a professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science.



The Japanese Housewife Overseas: Adapting to Change of Culture and Status,

by Ruth Martin,

Global Oriental, 2007, 162 pages including index bibliography and endnotes, ISBN 978-1-905246-43-4, £45.

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

Ruth Martin's study, which is based on a doctoral thesis, analyses the challenges and opportunities which the wives of Japanese businessmen faced when they accompanied their husbands on their postings to Britain. These differed depending on where their husbands worked.

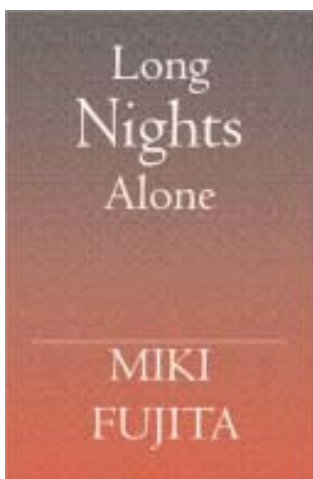
Those posted to London often found that their husbands worked just as long hours as in Japan whereas the Japanese working in factories such as those around Telford tended to follow British hours and could spend more time with their families. Inevitably Japanese customs often prevailed especially in firms operating in the London environment. For instance the managerial hierarchy was reflected in the meetings of company wives where juniors had to get up and bow when the boss's wife came in and when she departed to her chauffeur driven car. Outside London the atmosphere was less hierarchical. One striking difference between being in Japan and Britain was that whereas in Japan wives rarely met other company wives in Britain they were much more likely to socialize with the other wives in their company.

It is noteworthy that practically none of the Japanese wives took up any paid employment when they were in Britain. Ruth Martin does not say whether British employment laws had anything to do with this. She points out, however, the voluntary work which Japanese wives undertook. They have, for instance, made a significant contribution to the 'Japan in Your Classroom' scheme sponsored by the Japan Festival Education Trust and Japan 21, now incorporated into the Japan Society. She notes the way in which the Japan Festival in 1991 and Japan 2001 "have gone a long way in affecting the image of Japan in the UK, especially among younger people."

A major challenge for Japanese wives in Britain has inevitably been language. Many wives came to Britain with an inadequate knowledge of English. This made it difficult for them to settle down and cope with problems in dealing with schools and household affairs which fell to them while their husbands were at their offices or factories. As Ruth Martin points out colloquial English can be very puzzling. One child was told to bring "Wellingtons" to school for an excursion. The mother eventually discovered what was wanted. In fact Japanese women, when given the right training, often prove better linguists than Japanese men. Some of the best Japanese/English interpreters, in my experience, are educated Japanese women, but they need to develop self-confidence. Many Japanese are afraid to of making mistakes and by so doing being impolite; accordingly they tend to be reluctant to take part in conversations thus making it more difficult for them to make English friends.

Many Japanese wives came to appreciate Britain as a place in which to live, but they also found some negative aspects of life in Britain such as the lack of customer service especially in London and the unreliability of British workmen plus, of course, the unpunctuality of British trains. Many did, however, make good English friends and these friendships often endured after they returned home. Life in Britain also helped many of them to appreciate better both the good and the bad points about life in Japan.

Ruth Martin's study understandably does not come to any startling conclusions, but its analysis contains much of interest to a student of Japanese society and culture and deserves to be read by more than the social science community.



Long Nights Alone,

by Miki Fujita,

BookSurge Publishing, 2006, 268 pages, ISBN: 1419614274

Review by J. Sean Curtin

Long Nights Alone is an impressive debut English language novel by the established Japanese author Miki Fujita. The book seamlessly transports the reader to the intriguing but socially ridged world of 10th Century Japan. Fujita brilliantly blends a fascinating historical setting with a gripping narrative which makes for compelling reading. The way people lived in 10th Century Japan is probably a complete mystery to most non-specialist readers and this makes the rich tapestry of historical facts laced throughout the book one of the reasons it is so enjoyable to read. Fujita succeeds in skilfully illuminating a complex lost world in this excellently researched novel. Her lucid, engaging writing style makes the transition to this distant alien land seem almost natural, and she allows the reader to understand a little of the dynamics of the period. I certainly felt I gain some insights into the social structure of the period, and how it shaped the logic as well as behaviour of the people of that age.

The novel largely revolves around the life, love and frustrations of the talented Lady Bellflower, whose life course is dictated by the complex social norms of the period. The actions of the young, innocent Bellflower are severely restricted by the traditions of her age and in many respects she is the archetypal bird in a gilded cage. Her thoughts burn with passion and curiosity about the world which she so eloquently depicts in poetry, while her heart yearns to know the true meaning of love. Yet this beautiful young woman finds herself trapped in a realm where the kind of love she so desperately craves is an illusion confined to the realms of fiction. Following the social conventions of the time her parents strongly encouraged her to marry a man from a prominent family to enhance their own and her social status. They recommend a union with the down-to-earth Fujiwara Tomonaga, who is an up-and-coming aristocrat. To a certain degree Tomonaga is the antithesis of Bellflower's male ideal and she tries to resist his advances. An inner struggle between love and duty plays itself out within the young energetic woman, but Bellflower eventually submits to her family's

wishes, agreeing to tie the knot with Tomonaga.

Her new husband already has one established wife, the calculating Lady Wisteria, as well as a long-term mistress, the gracious Morning Glory. Soon after her wedding night Bellflower discovers the agony of being forced to share her new husband with another woman and the conflict this creates within her eventually consumes her. Over time the pain of her situation makes her selfish and bitter until her poetry is the only true vestige of her former self.

Bellflower channels her passion into her writing as a means of escape from the social sarcophagus within which she is entombed, but while her prose remains sophisticated it conceals a darker side. At the other end of the spectrum, the same cultural milieu transforms Tomonaga's mistress, Morning Glory, into a beacon of self-sacrifice whose virtue outshines all the other characters. Lady Wisteria, Tomonaga's scheming first wife, is the great survivor of the story and one feels she would be at home in any age. How each of these very different women copes with the confines of the age they find themselves in is one of the fascinating themes of the narrative. As for Tomonaga, despite his many faults he eventually learns the meaning of true love.

According to a foreword by the author, the underlying source for the novel is a 10th Century diary by an aristocratic woman known to history only as "Mother of Michitsuna" who was married to the powerful aristocrat Fujiwara Kaneiye. This diary was required reading for classical literature classes when Fujita was a high school student in Japan and while "Long Nights Alone" is an entirely original work, the poems from this classical work about the deep loneliness the lady felt when her husband was away provided the inspiration for the novel. It seems that allowing the non-Japanese reader greater insights into Japan is one of Fujita's primary objectives and presumably one of the main reasons she decided to write the novel in English instead of her native Japanese. The result of her efforts is an impressive debut English language novel, which offers an enlightening window on a murky period of Japan's history. With "Long Nights Alone" Fujita has established herself as a new talent to watch.

Long Nights Alone: Reader's Comments

by Clare Keen

Long Nights Alone is a must-read novel set in ancient Japan, a really fascinating period. For me, this book opened up a whole new chapter in Japan's long history. I really felt sympathy for Lady Bellflower, the main female character, who is described in realistic terms. You can genuinely understand the injustice she feels at having to marry someone she does not love, Fujiwara Tomonaga, and then have that person share his time with her and another woman, Lady Wisteria. The tale also made me reflect on the human condition in general as the novel is based on a 10th Century diary. Duty, love, power, romance, pride, passion, obligation, endurance and revenge have all been with mankind for as long as the written word has existed. Miki Fujita's writing style really makes the most of this potent mix of emotions and she gives us a great historical backdrop. I just could not stop reading this book once I started. You could really empathize on different levels with Bellflower, Lady Wisteria, and Morning Glory. The ending even brought a tear to my eye and I hope there will be a sequel or maybe even a movie, it would make a fantastic period piece.

Hula Girls - special event and screening



Review by Susan Meehan

For the third year running, the Embassy of Japan organised an excellent festival of new Japanese films at BAFTA over the weekend of 14-16 September 2007. Guided

by the expert hands of Tony Rayns and Alexander Jacoby, the choice of films on offer was extremely good.

Hula Girls (2006) had its UK premiere on Saturday 15 September and was preceded by a talk between acclaimed East Asian film critic Tony Rayns and director, Lee Sang-II, who flew over from Japan especially for the event. Gently probing, Tony Rayns elicited interesting and lengthy replies from the very thoughtful and eloquent Lee, on topics ranging from Lee's Korean ethnicity to his time at film school and his opinion on the state of the Japanese film industry (though more people in Japan are watching Japanese rather than foreign films, most of these tend to be TV spin offs - a situation Lee is not happy with).

Lee was born in Niigata, Japan in 1974, but having attended a Korean School in Japan, he said that there had been times when he had felt isolated from Japanese society and had been moved to make films on the Korean situation such as *Blue Chong* (Ao Chong, 2000), a portrayal of third generation Koreans in Japan. *Blue Chong*, Lee's graduation piece from the Japan Academy of Moving Images was also his first feature film and won him the Grand Prize at the PIA Film Festival. His next film, *Borderline* (2002) once again mused on Japanese society and the *zainichi* or ethnic Koreans.

The success of *Borderline* led to the Japanese film industry knocking on Lee's door. Unable to refuse the lucrative offers which came his way, a rather wistful Lee conceded that it meant no more dabbling with indies - at least for the time being. His ambition is to make an independent movie with a great budget, but the first step towards this is to work in the mainstream.

Lee's third film, *Sixty Nine*, was a change of pace and studio commission (Toei) based on the Ryu Murakami autobiographical book and was followed by *Scrap Heaven* about two boys, a girl and their revenge game and then *Hula Girls*.

Hula Girls was released to much critical acclaim in Japan in September 2006 and went on to win five major awards at the 2007 Japan Academy Awards including best film, best director, best screenplay, best supporting actress and most popular film. It also won two major awards at the prestigious 80th Kinema Junpo Awards including best film and best actress.

Though centering on a motley crew of women in hula gear, the film is reminiscent of the *Full Monty*, *Billy Elliott*, *Calendar Girls* and *Brassed Off* in its depiction of the demise of a mining community and its demoralised citizens. It is 1965 Japan and the mining town of Iwaki in Fukushima Prefecture is in terminal decline with the collapse of the coal mining industry. In hope of restoring Iwaki's fortunes, the town's elders and sole mining company have a whacky idea - the building of a

Hawaiian Centre in this region of Japan which experiences winters bitter enough to obliterate the hardiest of palm trees.

By turns funny and sad and occasionally menacing with glimpses into domestic violence, *Hula Girls* is undoubtedly a feel-good film and the local Japanese dialect used is a joy to hear. Characters are developed fully and change over the course of the film which is charged at times with tension and conflict ("the essence of drama," according to Tony Rayns).

We were extremely privileged to have another audience with Lee after the screening. Looking very relaxed, he told Tony Rayns that much research had gone into the film which he wrote with Daisuke Habara - he visited Iwaki of course and read interviews with the dancers and miners. The Hawaiian centre (now called the Spa Resort Hawaiians) still exists and since the film's success has been fully booked for months ahead.

We were not surprised to hear that Lee made the film with the features *Billy Elliott*, *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty* very much on his mind. As to the lack of romance in the film, Lee initially said this would have got in the way of the story, but then admitted that in the first version of the film which was just under three hours long, romance did feature. Pressed into shortening the film, the romance between the Hula teacher and Kimiko's brother and a love interest for Sayuri were sacrificed. There was a collective melancholic sigh from a rather soppy audience at this point.

In answer to a question about favourite directors, Lee said he continues to respect Imamura Shohei and admires Ken Loach - he loved *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*.

Following the Q&A, I couldn't believe my luck at being introduced to Lee over a drink of Guinness in the swanky BAFTA bar and asked him about his influences. Lee said that he likes films by Kurosawa Akira, Martin Scorsese, Imamura Shohei, Francis Coppola, Ken Loach and Stanley Kubrick. He naturally likes the films which *Hula Girls* is often compared to (*Billy Elliott*, *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off*) and had even been to Victoria Palace to see the *Billy Elliott* musical during his stay in London.

As to actors outside of Japan whom he respects and would like to work with, Lee mentioned Liam Neeson, Sean Penn and Daniel Day Lewis. I started getting a feel for this director who likes heavy-weight actors with a political and social conscience and identified with his good taste! I suggested that he might like Jim Sherridan's *In the Name of the Father*, which he does, and Lee also said that he loves Ken Loach's *Sweet Sixteen* and Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting*, which made a tremendous impact on him. Given the chance, he would like to make a film based on the novel by thriller writer Takamura Kaoru called *Shoot the Riviera*, which takes place in Ireland, Japan and the UK.

I can't wait to see Lee back in London and look forward to his next film which he is already working on. It is set in the 1880s, and deals with the modernisation of Japan and the Ainu of Hokkaido post-Meiji Restoration; certainly something to look forward to!





Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman

by Haruki Murakami, translated from Japanese by Philip Gabriel and Jay Rubin,

Vintage, 2007, 436 pages, ISBN: 978-0-099-51282-0

Review by Mikihiro Maeda

Haruki Murakami's novels are translated into around forty languages. Murakami is one of the most famous living Japanese novelists, and at the same time he is a translator of American literature into Japanese, namely the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Truman Capote, John Irving and Raymond Carver. As many Japanese may know, his novel "Norwegian Wood" (Noruwei no Mori) was published in 1987, and this two-volume book has sold around eight million copies in both hard cover and paperback in Japan and has made him a national celebrity.

This book "Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman" is a collection of twenty-six short stories from the surreal to the mundane, some of which he wrote while staying at a U.S. university after the publication of "Norwegian Wood". In 1981 he wrote 'The Mirror', 'A Perfect Day for Kangaroos', 'Dabchick', 'The Year of Spaghetti', and 'The Rise and Fall of Sharpie Cakes.' The final five stories, 'Chance Traveller', 'Hanalei Bay', 'Where I'm Likely to Find It', 'The Kidney-Shaped Stone That Moves Every Day' and 'A Shinagawa Monkey' appeared in the book "Strange Tales From Tokyo" (Tokyo Kitanshu), published in Japan in 2005. Although five stories share the same theme, each story can be read separately.

In the introduction of this book he described his short story writing style as follows: "I find writing novels a challenge, writing short stories a joy. If writing novels is like planting a forest, then writing short stories is more like planting a garden." When he finished writing novels he wanted to write short stories, and once a group of short stories was finished he again focused on writing a long novel or he rewrote short stories and incorporated them into novels in some cases. 'Firefly' in this book was incorporated as parts of the long novel "Norwegian Wood," and 'Man-Eating Cats' was "Sputnik Sweetheart" as readers may notice. And 'Crabs', 'A Poor Aunt Story', 'Hunting Knife' and 'Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman' have all been greatly revised before translation into English, so the versions published in Japan differ from the stories in this book. Before translation into English, Murakami also made minor changes to parts of stories with which he was not pleased.

Sometimes when Murakami writes a novel, he writes in English at first and then translates it into Japanese with the rhythms of jazz. According to the author, his English vocabulary is more limited than his Japanese vocabulary, so it is easy for him to write in simple sentences. Regarding the influence of jazz music, he ran a jazz bar in the western part of Tokyo with his wife for one year before graduation from Waseda University until he had to stop to concentrate on writing novels. So in his novels we can enjoy many famous jazz and popular western songs. I think one sentence in the introduction of this book should be introduced here: "An idea that springs up in your mind, a word, an image, whatever. In

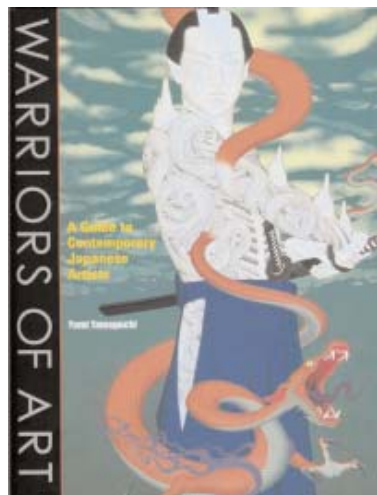
most cases it's like jazz improvisation, with the story taking me where it wants to."

It also should not be forgotten that Murakami is not a perfectionist about published translations of his works. He does not hesitate to publish a new book in foreign languages, even if the translated version is not perfect or is incomplete. He has said that it is much more important to publish in good time than to wait for the perfect version to come later. Some Japanese writers hesitate about whether their works should be translated into other languages, saying that the original Japanese meaning will not be conveyed accurately in other languages. But in this global age, those novels not translated are never read by foreigners. Novels should be translated into other languages to be read worldwide.

Why are his works loved by and attractive to so many readers not only in Japan but also in foreign countries, mainly in Taiwan and China? In one of his most famous novels, "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle," he examined the Manchuria incident, which occurred during World War II, and apparently he regrets the Japanese military action in China at that time. It appears that this is one of the reasons why Murakami is well accepted in Asian countries, mainly China. Moreover, in the day and age when Murakami was young it seems that people appreciated inner spiritual satisfaction much more than the materialism embraced these days.

"Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman" was the winner of the 11th annual Kiriyama Prize in 2007 and the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award in September, 2006. Also, in 2006 Murakami received the Franz Kafka Prize (Czech Republic) for his novel "Kafka on the Shore (Umibe no Kafka)." Two recipients of this latter prize before him won the Nobel Prize for Literature, so it seems that Murakami will be a possible nominee for the Nobel Prize in the near future.

This review was produced in collaboration with Global Communications Platform and first published on the Platform: <http://www.glocom.org/>



Warriors of Art: A Guide to Contemporary Japanese Artists

by Yumi Yamaguchi and Arthur Tanaka,

Kodansha International, 2007, 176 pages, over 200 colour plates from 40 artists, ISBN 10: 4770030312, ISBN 13: 9784770030313, price £20.

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

This book will help anyone who wants to understand the contemporary art scene in Japan, who is sympathetic to contemporary art in Europe and who enjoys the sort of art collected by the Saatchi brothers. It is unlikely to appeal to the older generation who remain attracted by traditional Japanese

art and culture, but if we want to understand the attitudes of the younger generation in Japan we must be aware of modern trends and interests. This is therefore a book which whether we like the works of the artists illustrated in it we cannot ignore. It brings together the works of 40 contemporary Japanese artists devoting four pages with vivid colour illustrations to each artist.

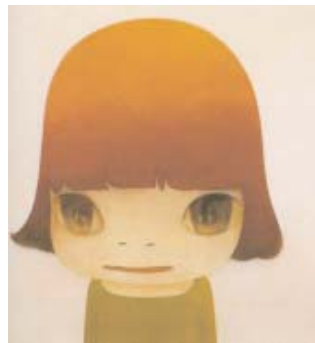
In her introduction Yumi Yamaguchi explains the background to and the development of modern Japanese art. The pioneer was Taro Okamoto (1911-1996) who "as an art student in France in the 1930s was influenced strongly by vanguard groups such as Abstraction-Création and the surrealists". The lead in the final years of the twentieth century was taken by Takashi Murakami. In 2001 Murakami took his self-curated Superflat exhibition on a tour of the United States in which "he presented his concept that all creative works on a flat surface are 'hyper two-dimensional' or 'superflat,' and that the term superflat can also be used to describe the shallow emptiness of Japanese consumer culture." (Some members of the Japan Society may recall a lecture by Murakami at the Royal Institution when he expounded his theories and showed a film illustrating them. I for one came away not much the wiser.) Murakami's second exhibition called "Coloriage" was followed by a third exhibition entitled "Little Boy." This "emphasised the importance of otaku subculture - an obsession with the fantastic world of anime, manga, and computer games - in contemporary Japanese art."

Below is a photograph of Takashi Murakami's "Reversed Double Helix," 2003, urethane paint, fibre glass and steel: Yumi Yamaguchi tells us that Yoshitomo Nara's "depiction of cute yet menacing children have made a huge impact both in Japan and overseas." His "trademarks are his angry or troubled little girls, marooned against an empty background, excluded from the adult world."



She explains in her introduction that "A glance at the work of the forty artists introduced in this book reveals recurring images of the cute, the grotesque, the erotic, the violent. Japan is a society where the dividing lines between adult and child culture are blurred...It is a society where expressions of sexuality and violence flood the market place... But beneath the veneer of cultural chaos and futuristic decadence lies another Japan: a Japan where centuries of spiritual tradition have been passed down through the generations."

Yumi Yamaguchi provides a brief account of the work of each of the forty artists who are introduced in this book. For instance of Makoto Aida she notes that his themes are "diverse and unpredictable" and include "sadomasochism, political



satire and absurd humor." Junko Mizuno, she writes, "draws on the cute characters found in girls' comics and incorporates them into her own narrative world - a place where fantasy meets grotesque."



Preview: Under The Sun

by Justin Kerr-Smiley

Reportage Press, 2007, 243 Pages,
ISBN13: 9780955572937
(Hardback), £16.99p

Preview by J. Sean Curtin
(review next issue)

This is an impressive first novel by Justin Kerr-Smiley which grippingly depicts the suffering and pain of conflict and the humanity that lies within us all. The two protagonists, the English pilot Edward Strickland and the Japanese officer Captain Tadashi Hayama, slowly bridge the immense cultural gulf which divides them and in the process discover the meaning of true friendship. The duo have very different philosophical outlooks and the sometimes sharp contrast between the pair forms a central theme in the novel. It is a thought-provoking book exploring the psychology of conflict and how men cope with the immense trauma and terrible stresses of war. The narrative skilfully navigates around the complexities, contradictions and absurdities inherent in the wartime concept of 'the enemy' and how impossible it is to sustain such an idea in a conflict-free environment. It is set on an idyllic Pacific island largely untouched by the savage winds of WWII. The book is extremely well-researched and will appeal to those already familiar with Japan as well as the ordinary reader.

Under The Sun had a well attended book launch in Holland Park, London on 1st November 2007 at which the author, Justin Kerr-Smiley, signed copies of the novel and answered questions about the novel.

