



Emerging from the ruins

Susan Meehan and Ali Muskett explore the aftermath of disaster

The life of the mind

Examining the state of mental health care in Japan

To mark the first year anniversary of the devastating 11 March 2011 Tohoku Earthquake, now also known as the Great East Japan Earthquake, we devote this issue to looking at its aftermath. The massive scale of the destruction and terrible loss of life is almost beyond comprehension, something which poses a challenge to those trying to chronicle the catastrophe. Susan Meehan looks at the first documentary to have been made in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami by director Koichi Omiya. It's a hard-hitting and heart-breaking film which shows scene upon scene of devastation in North East Japan. It captures the eerie, almost surreal, atmosphere and immense scale of destruction along with the bitter tide of human tragedy. Omiya, who is from Tohoku, entitles his work *mujo* [無常] which is a Buddhist concept he defines as conveying impermanence or transience. Ali Muskett explores Elin Lindqvist's *Fukushima Colours* which describes the situation in the early post-devastation months. Lindqvist, a UK-based Swedish journalist and author who was born in Japan, immediately returned to Japan after the triple catastrophe to gather material for her book and present what she believes is a different perspective on the situation. Next Susan Meehan examines Stu Levy's film *Pray for Japan* which was shot in the immediate aftermath of the calamity. Levy volunteered with the Japan Emergency NPO (JEN) in Ishinomaki (a city with a population of over 160,000) in Miyagi Prefecture. He recorded

about 40 hours of footage during five weeks, interviewing over 30 people including victims and volunteers. He produces an extraordinary snapshot of life in Ishinomaki during the initial days and weeks of the disaster. We next look at the soon to be published work *Mental Health Care in Japan* edited by Ruth Taplin and Sandra J. Lawman. It's an impressive multi-authored volume examining the current state of mental health in Japan, especially in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. We also look at *Depression in Japan: Psychiatric Cures for a Society in Distress* a scholarly work by Junko Kitanaka which gives a clear view of the history of depression in Japan, its medicalization and its effects on society. Susan Meehan looks at *Himizu* a fictional movie set against the harsh backdrop of post earthquake and tsunami Japan. Director Shion Sono gives us a no-holds-barred unflattering tale, exposing a cruel and violent side of society that emerges with the implosion of social order. Sir Hugh Cortazzi examines Martin Dusingher's *Hard Times in the Hometown, A History of Community Survival in Modern Japan* which looks at the historical fortunes of the town of Kaminoseki in Yamaguchi prefecture. The future of the town was thrown into serious doubt after the Great East Japan Earthquake halted the building of a controversial nuclear plant on its outskirts. Mike Sullivan rounds off this issue with a look at an exciting new exhibition at Somerset House, *Kokoro: The Art of Horiyoshi III*.

Sean Curtin, April 2012

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Sketch of Mujo (無常素描)

Directed by Koichi Omiya
(大宮浩一)

2011, 75 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

This documentary is the first to have been made in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami which wrecked the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan on 11 March 2011. Tohoku is the land of Omiya's birth and his parents' home so the disaster particularly affected him.

Omiya defines *mujo* [無常] as a Buddhist concept conveying impermanence or transience. The Japanese often resort to this idea to alleviate the sadness of death and separation and to remind themselves that this world is but a stepping stone on the way to nirvana.

This heart-breaking and beautifully shot documentary shows scene upon scene of devastation in North East Japan. The eerie sound of crows in the background remind one of the immense death toll wreaked upon Tohoku. Within the scenes of rubble recognisable objects occasionally appear; a plastic bottle of *ume* (pickled plums) pokes through the dereliction and in the debris by the coast every now and then an almost intact house appears, highlighting the sheer level of destruction.

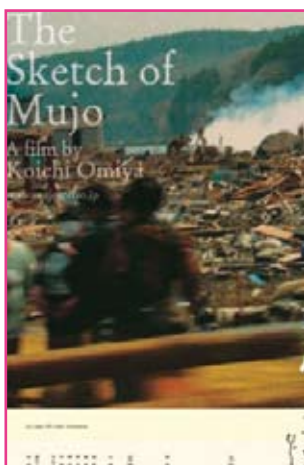
'The inhabitants of Tohoku realise that they can't beat nature and that sometimes the gods rage.'

Omiya intersperses the scenes of devastation with those of survivors. An old woman is shown looking through a photo album which she has salvaged. 'It's our history,' she says. 'We are coming to an end,' she continues and laughs with tears in her eyes.

A monk, reflecting on the disaster and the noble reaction and stoicism of the people of Tohoku, says that the people of North East Japan have never basked in the nation's wealth and that is why they are so modest. 'It is important,' he says, 'to protect and nurture those disappearing virtues.' 'The inhabitants of Tohoku realise they can't beat nature and that sometimes the gods rage. Maybe we have erred on the wrong path.'

Further testifying to the steadfastness and lack of self-pity of those affected by the earthquake and tsunami, a young, bright woman is interviewed – she can't leave her hometown – she loves the sea, 'It is beautiful,' she remarks.

We encounter evacuation centres piled high with blankets and mattresses and replete with kettle, kerosene stoves and bright, young, spirited boys and older people. We meet a 98-year-old woman who has to rev herself up on a daily basis in order to keep going.



The monk appears again and this time talks about Laos where bridges are washed away every year. They are not built to resist; this fleeting existence encapsulates *mujo* – nothing is permanent, nothing stays the same.

I was unsure when the documentary was made but there are distinctive clues towards the end as we see carp streamers flying in the wind indicating it is around the time of the boys' day celebration on 5 May and a few daffodils growing out of the mud. I wonder how the people of Tohoku are coping this winter.

Sketch of Mujo ends with a shot of the young woman who loves the sea resolutely standing, basked in light. We also see an endless queue of cars (ferrying people to *hanami* or similar celebrations I wondered) motionless under the cherry tree blossoms swaying in the wind – the symbol, par excellence, of the transitory nature of life.

This film was shown at the Premiere Japan 2011 event at the Barbican.

Fukushima Colours

by Elin Lindqvist

Langenskiöld(*), 2012

155 pages, approx. £17.00

ISBN: 978-91-87007-04-0

Review by Ali Muskett

Elin Lindqvist, journalist and author of three novels in Swedish, was born in Japan in 1982 and lived there for two years as a child. She currently lives in England, but has maintained a strong connection with Japan, having spent further time there in her teens and twenties.

Immediately after the triple catastrophe of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster on 11 March 2011, Elin was moved to travel to Japan. She felt she needed to be there to see things for herself, and to report on the situation in a fair and honest way, which she thought the Western media was not doing. Many would agree that the Western media sensationalised certain aspects of the disaster – especially the situation at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant – and Elin was determined to find out what things were really like in Tohoku (the north-eastern region of Honshu, the main island of Japan). In March 2011 Elin wrote for the largest Swedish daily newspaper, *Aftonbladet*, and she returned in May 2011 to write about the reconstruction process and continuing nuclear crisis for newspapers *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Dagbladet*.

Fukushima Colours is the result of a number of visits to Japan in the months following the disaster, and went to print 10 months after Elin's initial visit. Elin was accompanied by photographer Yoshikazu Fukuda and journalist Yuko Ota, and together they spoke to people affected by the catastrophe in



different ways. The eight individuals, or groups of individuals, who feature in this book were all affected by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis even though some of them do not live in the Tohoku region itself. Personal accounts come from organic farmers talking about the effects of the disaster on the agricultural industry and ways in which renewable energy can be used in the future, the founder and president of the aid organisation CRASH (a Christian volunteer group with which Elin volunteered, despite not being Christian), a fish and seafood restaurant owner and intermediate wholesaler at Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo, an oyster farmer, the managing director of a Honda car dealership and garage, a beef farmer (who is also the Lord of Soma, and creator of the volunteer organisation Soma Aid) and a couple of housewives, concerned about bringing up their children in world of uncertainty and possible radioactive contamination.

The book is beautifully designed, and the simple phrases (such as '我慢 GAMAN *Endure the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity*') which separate the chapters give the reader a moment to pause and reflect on each account. *Fukushima Colours* isn't quite what I had expected it to be, but that isn't necessarily a negative comment on the book. Personally, I had hoped to read the translated accounts directly from the mouths of those affected, but what I actually found was a book which contained Elin's voice throughout, as a kind of guiding voice and narrator. It was, at times, difficult to know if the words were Elin's or the interviewee's, and I felt that the tone of the book was set by the author's voice rather than the voices of the people I really wanted to hear from.

I believe the purpose of the book was to remember the lives lost in the triple disaster, but also to look to the future through the eyes of the people who survived and are trying to reconstruct their lives. I did, however, feel that the overall 'message' of the book was unclear, and reflected the great uncertainty in Japan at the time of the interviews. The oyster farmer's wife comments, 'the colour of the sea water is different than it used to be before the tsunami,' but no one knows what this means. A certain sense of fear comes through in some accounts, and for me this fear and uncertainty formed a heavy cloud over the book, blocking out the bright colours of the future that I think it hoped to show.

**Fukushima Colours* has been published in both English and Swedish (Swedish title: *Fukshimas Färger*)

Pray for Japan

Directed by Stu Levy

2012, 97 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

The Japan Society organised a special charity screening for the European premiere of Stu Levy's documentary film, *Pray for Japan*, at the British Academy for Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) on 14 March 2012.



After the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, Stu Levy volunteered with the Japan Emergency NPO (JEN) in Ishinomaki (a city with a population of over 160,000), Miyagi Prefecture. He shot 40 hours of footage over five weeks, interviewing over 30 people including victims and volunteers. At the time of the earthquake Levy was in Tokyo. The film is an extraordinary snapshot of life in Ishinomaki [石巻市] within days of the earthquake and tsunami.

The film starts by zooming into Ishinomaki, the largest coastal city in north east Japan, as it was prior to the disaster. This footage is beautiful, sharp and exhilarating; we see Ishinomaki's unspoiled bridge, cherry blossoms and homes by the sea.

Yet more cherry blossoms appear. We are fast-forwarded to the events of March 11 and hear people talking about their hometown. A most poignant comment resonates, 'My hometown is everything.'

At the time of the earthquake Kento Ito, a high-school student, was performing with his band in Sendai, and a graduation ceremony at Ogatsu Middle School had not long concluded. Everyone was going about his or her business when the earthquake hit at 2:46pm on 11 March, changing everything.

Levy's interviewees recall their thoughts at the time. 'We thought it was a Tokyo earthquake.' 'There was no [phone] reception.' 'I thought the whole of Japan was going to sink.' 30 minutes later the destruction of the earthquake was compounded by a devastating tsunami which reached 40 metres in height at places. We see cars and huge containers being washed away, looking like miniature playthings in a child's bathtub. 'We lost it all,' says one of Levy's interviewees.

The film then breaks into almost psychedelic animation and guitar music, mirroring the viewer's disbelief and sense of surrealism at the extent of the destruction, the number of people deceased or missing and the thousands of evacuees.

We are exhorted to pray for love, rebirth, dedication, conviction, resilience, leadership, fortitude, the future, hope, the soul, compassion, strength, solidarity, recovery, unity, courage and Japan while beautifully crafted animated pictures are shown on the screen.

The Ishinomaki we now encounter is a ghost of its former self; it has been left wrecked with only piles of debris to account for the former homesteads. Homes have been washed away and so has the bridge.

Levy focuses on four themes: shelter, school, family and volunteers, letting the people of Ishinomaki speak for themselves. He keeps returning to each of these items in turn for the remainder of the film. This results in repetition and frustration as no one's story or viewpoint is ever given enough time or the chance to develop.

About 1,500 people sheltered in a flooded gym and were isolated for three days with no food and only four bottles of water. Priority was given to the dehydrated, the elderly and children while the healthy survived without water for three days. Provisions finally arrived, in the form of 300 rice balls. An impressive Council man reads the 'emergency manual' in the

gym which says that food must not be distributed until there is enough to share with all evacuees to ensure fairness and that fights don't break out. These dispossessed individuals wait until they have enough rice balls for everyone to receive 'half a portion.' The Council man, extraordinary in his sense of justice and dignified and charming comports, is an undoubted star of the film and a shining example of humanity to all.

We then shift to Ogatsu Middle School. The graduation ceremony for the Year Six had taken place earlier that afternoon and the kids had been sent home at about 1pm on 11 March. They were all scattered throughout the city when the earthquake and tsunami hit. As the spirited art teacher remarked, had they all been at school at the time of the disaster it is likely that many wouldn't have survived as school emergency procedures and rigmarole, including roll call, would have delayed evacuation.

The teachers, who feel tremendous responsibility for each of their pupils, went to Ogatsu Shinrin Park and compiled the names of all their pupils from memory. Their next objective was to track down their seventy-seven pupils. By 19 March all pupils had been accounted for, dispersed amongst seventeen different evacuation centres.

In an attempt to create a sense of normality and cohesion, the school is relocated to the nearby, apparently empty Iinogawa High School. The pupils derive great comfort from their new base and this decides their families to stay in the area rather than evacuate Tohoku. This is testament to the extraordinary vitality and speedy action of the teachers.

The film then breaks into almost psychedelic animation and guitar music, mirroring the viewer's disbelief and sense of surrealism at the extent of the destruction.'

The school motto is changed for the first time in 30 years, the new version comprises the Japanese for 'resilience' (たたくましく).

A third focus is the Ito family. Kento, a seventeen-year old student from Ishinomaki Nishi Senior High School, was rehearsing for a gig in Sendai with his band members when the earthquake struck. Finally back in Ishinomaki, having been stranded in Sendai for two days, he heads to the razed area where his house had stood and begins a quest for his family by visiting the evacuation centres. He is reunited with his father and one of his brothers, but discovers that his adorable five-year old brother Ritsu has died along with his mother and grandparents. They were all at home when the earthquake struck and decided to flee by car. Tragically, this was not to be as they were stuck in traffic when the tsunami claimed their lives.

Amidst the rubble, Kento finds a colourful carp streamer which reminds him of little Ritsu who loved seeing the koi nobori (carp streamers) flying in the wind on Children's Day, 5 May. Kento manages to gather hundreds of carp streamers sent from well-wishers all around Japan and hoists them up in honour of little Ritsu in time for Children's Day. This part of the film is particularly harrowing as we see Kento, friends and band members back in the desolation where the Ito's

house had been. They beat Japanese taiko (drums) with a frenzy and passion reflecting their agonising heartbreak. While honouring and perhaps calling the dead, their valiant resolve to keep living despite the overwhelming grief is apparent. Once the drumming is over, lit lanterns, flickering like fireflies, are sent down the river in memory of the dead.

At one of the volunteer emergency centres, two busloads of volunteers from Sendai are arriving every day and three busloads on the weekends. One volunteer says, 'There's no give and take; it's give, give, give.' It is clear that the longer the volunteers stay in Ishinomaki, the more reluctant they are to leave as they are aware of how much needs to be done. The volunteers selflessly dedicate themselves to their work with impressive panache: cooking, shovelling mud, clearing up debris and generally elevating the spirits of those in the shelters.

As we begin to see early glimmers of hope and a slow return to normality, there is a farewell party for some of the volunteers who are returning home, having been helping since immediately after the earthquake up until April. Many of the volunteers are set to return to Ishinomaki in the near future in order to help once again. For many, Ishinomaki has become their second home.

Levy finishes by asking his interviewees what they expect the situation will be one year on. The answers vary from, 'Still in chaos,' to 'Lots of debris still,' to 'I don't know' to 'I've no clear picture' to 'The situation won't be rosy in a year.' Levy himself could have added his own insights at this point or galvanised people to act and help (rather than pray).

It is a pity that the film doesn't include current information on the situation in Ishinomaki to bring it up to date. With the immediacy of the news, blogs and social media in general, we have all been made aware of the devastation wreaked in Tohoku which has been reported on a global scale. Levy's film is another reminder of what happened. It would, perhaps, have been helpful to have a perspective on the situation in other parts of Tohoku, not just Ishinomaki, or to have heard about the role of the government or the nuclear accident or speculations about the future of Ishinomaki and Tohoku.

On 12 March an explosion blew apart the building containing reactor 1 at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, yet no mention of this crisis is made in the film.

Instead of an objective interlocutor, adding useful information not known or available to the interviewees at the time of filming, there is an occasional female voice reading aloud poems in Japanese. This is an unnecessary pretension and somewhat irritating. Along with the animation it was perhaps intended to give the film an artistic dimension, but failed to add anything of positive worth.

The way Levy focused on the shelter, the volunteers, a family and a school was ambitious but the continual tug between the four perspectives resulted in a rather disjointed film. A more in depth look at the volunteers or evacuees or the school alone might have made for an improved film.

While undeniably a powerful film, we could have done with having seen it in May of last year or in the run-up to the first year

commemoration of the disaster rather than a year on. For Levy it is important to point out that 900,000 people are still living in shelters and that 650,000 have lost their livelihoods and that entire villages have been destroyed. However, the needs of the evacuees have moved on and we have become aware of different and changing issues through daily updated blogs. Moving into the present doesn't diminish the horror of what happened a year ago; it, acts in fact, as a means of ensuring that awareness of the situation in Tohoku is ever present.

Levy has produced a good film for an excellent cause. Though I'd exhort everyone to do what they can for the recovery of Tohoku and not to forget this important cause, the film won't add to what we already know.

Mental Health Care in Japan

Edited by Ruth Taplin and Sandra J. Lawman

Routledge: Contemporary Japan Series, June 2012

148 pages, £90.00

ISBN: 978-0-415-69068-3

Review by Sean Curtin



This impressive multi-authored work comprehensively examines the current state of the mental health system in Japan. It furnishes an excellent overview of the present situation and the multifaceted issues facing the country. Despite having one of the world's highest suicide rates, mental health issues are often underplayed or completely overlooked. Other major challenges confronting the country are widespread depression, institutionalisation, over sedation of patients and a relatively restrictive mental health care system. All these important topics are analysed in this work which meticulously explores the current challenges. It provides a helpful overview of the complex tapestry of the current system and discusses the latest legislation, approaches to treatment and problematic areas.

Although research indicates depression is relatively common in the country, with a significant increase since the devastating March 2011 triple catastrophe, according to Hiroto Ito, 'awareness of depression is not high in Japan (page 45).' Psychiatric care is also problematic as Hajime Oketani and Hiromi Akiyama outline, 'Massive doses of psychiatric drugs are administered in order to keep the patients under sedation; they are often over-sedated. Then, the treatment is considered as "going well" . . . This is the background of megadose culture in psychiatric care in Japan, which is extremely unique; few countries in the world practise this type of mental care approach (page 83).'

To provide a comprehensive picture, there is analysis of key cultural aspects which impact on mental health. For example, the role of family structures in contributing to mental health

problems is looked at as well as the wider social concepts of *tatemae* and *honne*. Ruth Taplin writes in the comprehensive introductory chapter, *Tatemae* and *honne* are concepts essential to understanding the Japanese psyche as the former refers to how things should be and the latter refers to the reality and how things are in actuality . . . In Japan, the very attempt to separate the two states of mind so they do not come into conflict can cause tension, especially within the context of the family where it is more difficult to hide true feelings (page 2).'

There is analysis of various ideas and practices concerning a variety of aspects related to rehabilitation into the workforce and the community and service user groups that empower the mentally afflicted. Sandra Lawman believes, 'The user movement in Japan is fragile and needs further nurturing (page 111),' while Satoru Hashimoto observes, 'At the present time, the way of creating new jobs for those with metal disorders is not generally accepted at Japanese enterprises (page 70).' The topic of the social stigma attached to mental health issues is explored by Shuntaro Ando and Graham Thornicroft (pages 113-142) with some illuminating international comparisons while a Japan-Britain analysis of the user movement is given by Sandra Lawman (pages 98-112).

On attitudes towards mental illness Shuntaro Ando and Graham Thornicroft conclude, 'In Japan, knowledge about the causes of mental illness was found to be poor, and weakness of personality was preferred as the cause rather than heritability . . . The majority of the general public in Japan presented social distance from individuals with mental illness especially in closer relationships (page 132).' They also noted that 'Japanese society's values emphasising conformity may also be a deteriorating factor for stigma against mental illness, which deviates from the norm (page 129).'

This work is also packed with a variety of interesting case studies, I particularly found the one by Yayoi Imamura on how people with mental illness can be integrated into a rural town enlightening (pages 79-82). The trial took place in the relatively remote town of Urakawa in Hokkaido and demonstrates that the countryside in Japan is not as conservative as it is generally portrayed.

It has only been in recent years that mental health issues have become a more prominent public issue of concern with demands for action. This momentum can be seen in the various laws and reforms that have been passed in the past decade. Dr Hiroto Ito, one of the book's contributors who looks at this issue (pages 36-56), has also been closely involved with helping shape government policy. The issue of counselling those with post traumatic stress has also become a prominent issue since the devastating 11 March 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and it is hoped this should spur further improvements in the system.

While there are many challenges facing the mental health system in Japan, most contributors to this work believe the overall situation is improving. Shuntaro Ando and Graham Thornicroft recommend, ' . . . educational programmes that focus on the adverse effect of institutionalism and offer direct social contact with people with mental illness

are required in Japan, as they have been shown to be effective in the world (page 133).’ Focusing on the positive Hajime Oketani and Hiromi Akiyama comment, ‘What we can do, from within the field of mental health, is to keep on nurturing good aspects of Japanese culture and society and contribute to build communities where people can happily live their lives (page 96).’

The book was launched on 26 June 2012 at a lively and well attended seminar entitled ‘Mental Health Care in Japan’ which was held in the impressive surroundings of St. Dunstan’s Church, in Fleet Street, London. There were four speakers, three of the book’s contributors, Graham Thornicroft with editors Ruth Taplin and Sandra Lawman along with Yuriko Suzuki, a Japanese psychiatrist with first hand experience of treating and dealing with the victims of post traumatic shock in Japan. Koji Maruyama, First Secretary (Health and Welfare) at the Embassy of Japan in the UK also spoke about the importance of improving mental health care in Japan. All the speakers underlined the increased importance of the topic since the Great East Japan Earthquake and how this new book will help non-Japanese understand the current state of mental health care and the challenges facing Japan.

It is often difficult to find good quality analysis of these issues in English and this impressive new work fills an important void with first rate contributions and analysis from a wide range of Japanese and foreign professionals and practitioners. The editors and authors deserved to be commended for producing this insightful and cutting-edge work.

Depression in Japan: Psychiatric Cures for a Society in Distress

by Junko Kitanaka [宮部みゆき] translated by Deborah Stuhr Iwabuchi

Princeton University Press, 2011

264 pages, £19.95

ISBN: 9780691142050

Review by Sandra Lawman



Miyuki In this very scholarly book, Junko Kitanaka gives a clear view of the history of depression in Japan, its medicalization and its effects on society.

From my own work on mental health in Japan, I know that suicide rates are soaring and depression is now a kind of ‘national disease’, but how did it get to this? It is deeply engrained into the Japanese psyche ‘not to stick out from the crowd’, but anyone with severe mental illness does, and this attitude makes it worse. Even not at the severe end, there is a high incidence of low level depression which affects the economy and the general well-being of the population. Kitanaka highlights *karoshi* or death from overwork,

which now seems to be an accepted phenomenon.

She writes from a historical, clinical and sociological perspective, which are all her areas of academic expertise. Her account is fascinating and gripping, and she relates how historically, contra to previous opinion, there was a language for depression, and the talk of melancholia in the 19th century was very similar to the Western view. She goes on to relate how psychiatry fits in with this, and how now it is accepted and part of society and the wider human condition. She says (p51) ‘I suggest that the antipsychiatry movement – and its dismantling of traditional Japanese psychiatry – was crucial for preparing the conditions for the later medicalization of depression’. This was in the 1980’s and a very prevalent force in the West, from where from a different angle strong mental health service user movements were founded. Japan is now catching up with this.

She also spends some time both on the physiological effects of depression, which were the main concerns in medieval times, and then the 19th century somatisation of mental illness, when it was suggested it might have a biological basis. This was a good basis for the acceptance of psychiatry later.

Kitkanaka concentrates some of her work on the treatment of suicide, which was very much the focus of psychiatry fifty years ago, and details how this has developed into a wider mental health treatment which is now accepted. She is also very interesting on gender and depression, and points out that in Japan depression is seen as a male illness, whereas elsewhere it is very female. She says (p140) ‘In sharp contrast to the culturally evocative, sympathetic portrayal of overworked salarymen in the popular discourse, until recently no clear master narrative had existed for female depression.’ This is an interesting and new analysis of this issue and provides food for thought.

Overall the book adds greatly to the knowledge of the field, and is a jolly good read. More is being published now on this subject, and there is interest from a lay audience outside Japan, which is growing. Junko Kitanaka provides a scholarly insight into aspects of the issue, and a coherent overall view of the state of mental illness in Japanese society, and is to be commended for that.

Sandra J Lawman is an Associate for the Shaftesbury Partnership. She has recently co-edited with Dr Ruth Taplin ‘Mental Health Care in Japan’ published by Routledge in June 2012.

Himizu [ヒミズ]

Directed by Shion Sono

[園子温]

2011, 129 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

Film director Shion Sono was working on his adaptation of *Himizu*, a manga by Minoru Furuya [古谷 実] when Japan



was devastated by the 11 March earthquake and tsunami. Sono incorporated changes into his film accordingly.

Set against the backdrop of post earthquake and tsunami Japan the pain Himizu portrays is unrelenting and in contrast to often saccharine portrayals of Japan. It is hard-hitting and unflattering, exposing a cruel and violent side of society that emerges with the implosion of order.

Given that the Great North East Japan Earthquake left 19,000 dead perhaps Sono wanted to show how precarious and vulnerable we are as human beings, whether at the mercy of natural forces or other people.

Keiko Chazawa, played by Fumi Nikaido [二階堂 ふみ], befriends Sumida, played by Shota Sometani [染谷 将太], at school; she is absolutely smitten and wants the best for him. They are both fourteen years old and emotionally fragile.

Sumida wants to be 'normal', yet normal for him means living like a 'himizu' or mole – quietly and fending for himself. He lives in a shack and takes over his family's rental boat business. His mother leaves with another man and his father is alcoholic, abusive and mainly absent. While Sumida's mother wants her husband dead and fantasizes about killing him (when another earthquake strikes and no one will notice), Sumida's father wants his son dead. It is all very grim.

Keiko is hyperbolic and annoyingly, screechingly enthusiastic; she is Sumida's one-person cheerleading band. Keiko doesn't want Sumida to retreat from life but wants him to make a success of his boat rental business. In order to get him on his way, Keiko starts drumming up customers and producing fliers advertising the boats.

She receives no thanks; on the contrary, Sumida often slaps her when she is too exuberant for his liking. Depressingly, he repeats the behaviour of his odious parents.

'Himizu left me cold with nothing to show for the two hours spent watching it and, occasionally, averting my eyes from the violence.'

Keiko's parents are no nicer, but being wealthy, comfortably live in a large house in a nice part of town. They have lovingly arranged a noose for Keiko to hang herself, so it is no surprise that she would rather spend time away from home with Sumida despite his tendency to slap her.

The bleak, existential film is too uncomfortable to watch at times. While the violence portrayed made me feel queasy, the images of the destruction visited by the earthquake and tsunami which are interwoven into the film are, of course, far more harrowing, poignant and tragic for the whole of Japan.

Himizu left me cold with nothing to show for the two hours spent watching it and, occasionally, averting my eyes from the violence. While a bleak and violent series and film such as *This is England* is also a thoughtful comment on society, *Himizu*, unfortunately, does not match this depth, being somewhat erratic.

If Japanese society is to recover from its trauma, 'normality' shouldn't be the aspiration of the young. In any case,

being normal doesn't mean shying away from society but trying to fit in with the demands and constraints of family life and society while trying to make life better for all.

The two young stars played their roles exceedingly well and it is worth mentioning that Shota Sometani and Fumi Nikaido deservedly received the Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best New Young Actor and Actress at the 68th Venice International Film Festival in September 2011.

Hard Times in the Hometown, A History of Community Survival in Modern Japan

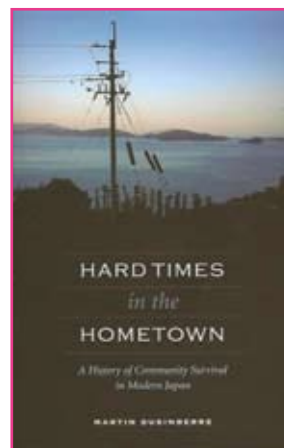
by Martin Dusinberre

University of Hawaii Press, 2012

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Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi



Martin Dusinberre first went to Kaminoseki, the subject of this book, as an English language teacher. He found the town of great interest and returned there to undertake sociological research.

In this well researched book he traces the history of the town and reviews its problems in the 21st century. Kaminoseki lies on the shore of the Inland Sea in what was the Chōshū domain [長州藩] and is now part of Yamaguchi prefecture. Hiroshima is not so far away. Kaminoseki (literally the upper barrier - 上関) was the counterpart in the Edo period of Shimonoseki (literally the lower barrier). Both were important 'guard' posts on the route from Nagasaki to Edo and were accordingly stopping places for the ambassadors from Nagasaki to the Shogun's court in Edo. Among these ambassadors were Korean envoys as well as the regular Dutch missions. So Kaminoseki was visited by such famous scholars as Engelbert Kaempfer and Carl Peter Thunberg when they accompanied the Dutch factor [chief executive officer] on his way to Edo to present his gifts to the Shogun. Robert Fortune, the plant collector, called there on the steamship England in 1860.

Fortunately for Dusinberre many of the town's records have been preserved although sifting through them was a complicated and difficult process. His book follows the growth of the town and its subsequent economic decline. In some respects Kaminoseki was typical of other rural and coastal towns. In other ways it was different not least because of its position on the route through the Inland Sea to Edo.

During the Edo period the Chōshū fief, whose headquarters were in Hagi [萩], maintained significant facilities in Kaminoseki including a large official guest house. In the early nineteenth century Kaminoseki had become an important trading centre where small Japanese wooden ships were being built. By the middle of the century the port was dominating

the village and the regional economy and providing non-agricultural employment. But from 1860 onwards steamships predominated and the port's importance declined.

Agriculture for which the land was poorly suited and fishing in the waters of the Inland Sea could not provide adequate employment for the population which grew quickly after the Meiji Restoration. Many left for the cities which developed with Japan's modernization. Others joined the flow of Japanese emigrants to Hawai'i and other places which welcomed Japanese immigrants.

A major development for the town was the bridge from Kaminoseki to Nagashima Island [長島] which was opened in 1969. This proved not to be quite the boon which the local people had hoped. Tourists now tended to be day trippers rather than staying over-night. The town's population which peaked at 13,200 in 1950 had declined to 6,100 by 1988 and has decreased further since then.

Kaminoseki benefitted to a limited extent from the furusato [hometown] boom of the 1970s. NHK in 1974 began to broadcast a series of dramas tracing the life of Hatoko who was said to be from Kaminoseki thus drawing attention to the plight of the town and its inhabitants.

The declining fortunes of the town and its geographical location attracted the attention of Chugoku Electric Power Company [中国電力株式会社] which planned to construct a nuclear reactor on reclaimed land near the town. This plan split the inhabitants into two opposing factions. The pro-nuclear faction won a mayoral election in 1987 but this seems to have been 'aided' by fraudulent registrations of non-town residents in the run up to the election. 111 offenders were prosecuted and fined but the election was not overturned. Dusinger, who traced the way in which power in the community had hitherto rested with a small number of comparatively wealthy families, notes (page 178) that 'The nuclear dispute exposed fault lines in island and town life over the extent to which the historical elites could continue to wield power.' Chugoku Electric Power were inept in handling the issues and in attempting to influence opinion in favour of allowing a nuclear power station in the vicinity of the town. A site has been cleared but building has not begun and following the Fukushima disaster prospects for one at Kaminoseki look bleak.

Kaminoseki cannot really be considered as a typical Japanese rural township, but Dusinger's analysis, which looks at so many aspects of local life including participation in local shrine festivals, casts some interesting light on many of the changes taking place in Japanese society and the economy.

Kokoro: The Art of Horiyoshi III

Exhibition at Somerset House, London

21 March – 1 July 2012

Review by Michael Sullivan

On the first day of spring 2012 a new exhibition opened up at Somerset House, although it is easy to get side tracked by Somerset House's terrace



which is always popular on warm spring days and by the spectacular sight of 10,000 ceramic daffodils that were placed in The Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court, if you venture into the South Wing you would have seen something very special. It has been named *Kokoro*, meaning heart, mind and spirit in Japanese, and as soon one entered the South Wing you were greeted by the sight of dragons appearing out of the mist, demons, gods and eerie ghosts. Horiyoshi III is a famous artist, who is a complete master of Japan's ancient art of tattooing, and his photo shown at the exhibition perfectly epitomises his strong connection with the kokoro of Japan as, bare chested but covered in tattoos, he poses with a katana. However, his amazing ability is not limited to skin as you can also see his work on silk.

There was a striking predominance of dragons appearing behind fire, water, mountain and the sky, but in stark contrast there were also scenes of bamboo that demonstrate a light and gentle touch, including one silk picture of a cat and butterfly. A more chilling sight was that of ghosts, their heads hanging to the side at an unnatural angle with long hair flowing to the ground. One rather shocking picture, called *Namakubi*, which has several meanings one of which being an acceptance of fate, that can't be described as it is best seen. The picture above is called *Kokoro Daruma with blade*, this highlights another side to Horiyoshi III's work as he embeds hidden messages in his work, in this case the katana stands for the kanji 刀「かたな」 which when put together with the kanji 心「こころ・しん」 below it forms a new word 忍「にん」 which means perseverance. In the centre of the second room of the exhibit there were also the tools of the tattooist's trade on show, though currently the artist uses a mixture of more modern electric needles as well as traditional methods.

They are amazing pictures and reveal an artistry that goes beyond mere images but also the culture of an entire civilisation as well as the mind of an extraordinary man who has practised his art for over 30 years.